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ARGOSY

NOVEMBER, 1952

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BY

CARSON McCULLERS

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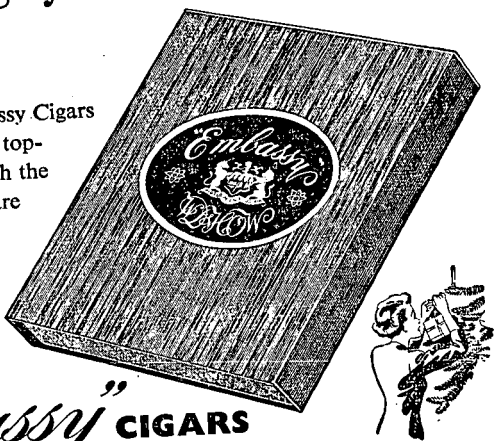

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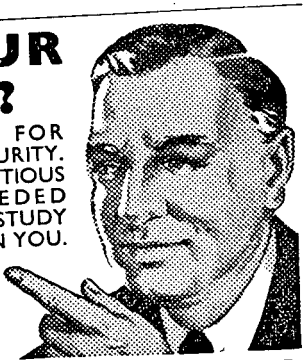

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ARGOSY

Contents for November, 1952

Vol. XIII **No. 11**

		Page
High Tide	**John O'Hare**	**4**
By courtesy of The Hand and Flower Press		
Across the Bay	**H. E. Bates**	**5**
Killer in the Pass	**H. G. Evarts**	**23**
Hidden Hands		**32**
Chasing the Stork	**Richard Gordon**	**33**
Triumph of Autumn		**40**
"Cornucopia," from "Mediaeval Latin Lyrics," by permission of Constable and Company; "The Burning of the Leaves," by courtesy of The Society of Authors and Mrs. Binyon; "Woodland Brown," by permission of The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Trustees of the Estate of the late A. E. Housman, and Jonathan Cape, publishers of A. E. Housman's Collected Poems; "November Birthday," by courtesy of Constable and Company		
Cat's-Paw	**Stanley Ellin**	**43**
The Ugly Maiden	**Larry Finn**	**57**
Portrait in a Garden	**L. E. Jones**	**60**
By permission of Martin Secker and Warburg		
Outside Chance	**John Welcome**	**61**
Storm in a Tea-Cup		**70**
The extract from "The Sorcerer," by courtesy of Miss Nancy McIntosh and Macmillan and Company; "Chaos!" from "The Years Between," by permission of Mrs. George Bambridge; "Something Stronger . . ," by courtesy of Chatto and Windus		
Turning Point	**I. A. R. Wylie**	**73**
To the North	**Frank Stuart**	**85**
From "Wild Wings," by permission of Victor Gollancz		
Affaire de Coeur		**94**
"Ali-Nur's Sweet Friend," from "The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night," by courtesy of Routledge and Kegan Paul; "Tryst," from "Lyrics from the Chinese," by permission of Constable and Company		
Story at Bedtime	**Dorothy K. Haynes**	**97**
Ladies' Night	**Joseph Carroll**	**101**
Tree Music	**Brooks Atkinson**	**116**
The Ballad of the Sad Cafe (First Part)	**Carson McCullers**	**117**
Argosy Crossword		**144**

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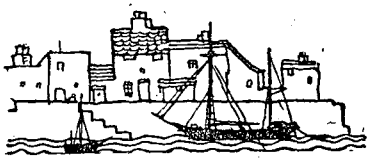

High Tide

THE windy moonlight tosses in the room
A thousand shillings minted by the trees.
Here is the silver for the passport to
Lands beyond the distant Hebrides.

Coin of the darkness, richer than all gold,
Pay for the passage with a lordly hand;
Scatter the largesse freely in the path,
Great be the profit to the serving band.

Now let the sail be filled by nobler winds,
The keel slip through the waters of the deep,
The compass set for the long going hence
Into the vast imperilments of sleep.

The prow is lifting to the topmost star.
Heed not the voices calling on the quay.
The urgent tide has business far away.
The voyager is alone upon the sea.

JOHN O'HARE

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ACROSS THE BAY

"The more you love the cleverer you get?" he said. "Is that it?"

by H. E. BATES

"HOW many *langoustines* today, Monsieur Harris?" the boy said.

Almost every day that summer there were big blue dishes of cream-pink *langoustine*, a sort of small spidery lobster, for lunch, and all through the sunny dining-room of the hotel there was a hungry cracking of claws. A fine bristling Atlantic air blew in hot from the bay.

The small boy Jean-Pierre had eyes like glistering blobs of bright brown sea-weed. "English! English!—in English please!" piped Jean-Pierre.

"Nine," said Harris.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—*noine*!"

"Nine."

"*Noine*."

"Please say nine!" Madame Dupont said. "Nine, Jean-Pierre—now! No more of that *noine*!"

"*Noine*."

"Ten now," Harris said and even Madame Dupont, the governess, who with small beady dark eyes and neat pink jaws delicately champing had something of the look of a refined *langoustine* herself, laughed gaily.

"I have to laugh," Madame Dupont said. "It's very wrong, but I can't help it. The boy is very happy."

Harris had begun to share a table under the window with Madame Dupont and the boy because now, in July, towards the height of the season, the hotel was quickly filling up. There were no longer any single tables for single men. Every day new French mammas and papas arrived with shrieking families and dour matriarchal grandmothers and small yapping dogs, and every day Madame Dupont, who had chosen the table in the corner because it was secluded and strategic, squinted finely through small gold spectacles so that she could see them better.

"That's a family named Le Brun who were here last year. They are from Lyons. He is in the *Sûreté*."

"How many *langoustines* now, Monsieur Harris?"

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"One dozen."

"Dozen, dozen, dozen? How many is that?"

"*Douzaine*," Harris said. "Dozen, *douzaine*. *Douze*, *douze*."

"It is the same," Madame Dupont said. "Isn't that so often the case? They are so alike, French and English."

"French is more beautiful—"

"Oh! no. English is very beautiful too." Sea-light from the wide hot bay sparkled on Madame Dupont's spectacles as she lifted her face. "The family Bayard has gone, I see. They have re-arranged the tables."

Harris, with his back to the room, could not see the comings and goings of French families. They were reflected for him in the flashing glasses, the brief arrested pauses of neat lean jaws, the way the silver lobster-pincers were held, delicately or with surprise or with a certain stern reproval and expectancy, over a pile of pink-brown shell and whisker.

"I believe they are going to put that family—no, they are not. Thank Heaven."

"Which family?"

"Blanche. The big fat man in the blue-striped shirt and the white cap that he always forgets to take off in the dining-room."

After the *langoustine* that day there were small *filets de sole Dieppoise* and *navarin d'agneau* with tender pale-olive peas.

The sun was a blinding silver on the bay. Big blue sardine boats, with blood-bronze sails, came round the distant point of pine and rock with deceptive grace, running quickly out of sight into port. Across the bay an almost complete circle of sand, dead white, lay below blue-black pine woods like a crust of salt left by the tide and baked to a dazzling fierceness by wind and sun.

By the time he reached the *navarin* Harris was quite sleepy. It was the same, he discovered, every day. Lunch began at twelve o'clock and every day he was determined to walk afterwards along the little coast road under the pines to find out for himself what lay on and about that dazzling curve of sand across the bay. Every day lunch with Jean-Pierre and Madame Dupont went on, with much laughter and sucking of grapes and coffee, until two o'clock, and after it he went to sleep in the sun.

At one-thirty Madame Dupont said, "It is very queer the table is not occupied. I find it very queer."

"Monsieur Harris is going to sleep," the boy said. "His eyes are shutting!"

"Oh! no, no, no. Wide awake. Thinking."

"Too many *langoustines*!"

"They have put special flowers on the table," Madame Dupont said. "Roses and things. Nice ones."

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"Monsieur Harris is asleep! He's not listening."

"I find it very queer," Madame Dupont said. "Special flowers and nobody coming!"

"The flowers are always for Americans," Harris said. "They will have ice-water and plain salad and make a fuss."

"Fuss, fuss?" the boy said. "What's that? What's fuss?"

"It's what you are," Madame Dupont said. "Fuss, fuss!"

"Fuss, fuss!" he said.

"You must not look," she said, "but the new people are just coming now."

Harris idly began to wash a bunch of grapes. In the water the dark skins gathered crusts of little pearls. The grapes were always sweet and delicious, but sometimes in the early pears and peaches there were to be found, to the boy's amusement, trundling fat maggots, pear-cream or peach-rose according to the flesh from which they unrolled, and Madame Dupont, in horror, covered her twinkling glasses with her hands.

Today, in the boy's slim green pear, there were no maggots, and Madame Dupont's eyes were alert and free.

"I thought it looked for a moment like Monsieur Bazin from St. Germain and his wife," she said. "He is a man of the same build."

"Not Americans?"

"Oh! no, no. French. An elderly man and a girl."

"Nice?" he said. "The girl."

A grape lay for a second in the centre of Madame Dupont's lips, delicately poised.

"A beauty."

As the grape slid into Madame Dupont's mouth, to be sucked and champed and swallowed swiftly away, she said:

"Can I describe her for you?" and went on, not waiting for an answer: "Very dark. No colour. Big brown eyes. And quite a big girl—big and round, with nice arms and hands." She broke off another grape. "About twenty-two."

"And him?"

"She's wearing a white sun-dress with a red coat that slips off. She's putting a flower into his buttonhole."

"What is he like?"

"A real French papa. He's a little short-sighted I think. He seems to find it hard to read the menu."

"Perhaps he is long-sighted instead," Harris said and Madame Dupont, looking hastily down under her glasses, washing grape-stained hands in the finger bowl, seemed for the first time a little confused.

"I have a feeling I have seen him somewhere before," she said.

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"Jean-Pierre, you must wash your hands. Quickly. We must go."

"Fuss fuss!" he said.

"Thanks to you he is learning English too quickly," she said. "Are you coming too?"

"Yes," he said. "I am going to walk across the bay."

"On your stomach, or swimming?" she said and once again the three of them laughed gaily together.

"He's asleep!" the boy said. "His eyes are shut!"

"Quiet!" she said. "Walk nicely from the dining-room."

"Tell me about the war," the boy said.

"No," he said. "Nothing to tell. I must walk across the bay."

He slept all the afternoon as usual, in the sun.

When he woke about five o'clock, the wind had turned a little northward, breaking straight through the small gap from the open sea. It stirred even the sheltered bay into a surface of jagged glass, a dark and wonderful indigo, with flouncing edges of salt-white foam. The air was so much cooler that he woke with a start, the wind quite cold across his shoulders, where his wound scar, almost invisible on dark sea-browned flesh, felt tight and dead.

He dressed and began to walk, as he had always promised himself, up the road that went along the bay. For about half a mile there were little hotels, each with its own small red-tented *plage*; a few villas with shutters pulled down on geranium-filled verandahs against the sun, and then four or five *pensions*, shuttered too and noiseless, behind walls of sea-bent cypresses. Between them a few boats lay beached, half-buried in thick white sand; and then the shore, at last, was clear—all pine and slate-blue rock and dune-grass, with the road winding thinner and thinner up the bay.

Here and there a cove of rock, a miniature bay, pushed the road farther inland, so that the sea was suddenly not visible over humps of bracken and pine. He began to see that the fine long curve of road was a deception. It would take hours, half a day, perhaps more, to walk the long circle to the point. Sand blew in sharp tedious whirls under the pines and a sound of shaken boughs, somewhere between a moan and a whine, not summery at all, was almost ugly in the cooling afternoon.

He was glad to be on a clear treeless road again, where he could feel sun. And then, abruptly, on a rise of rock, the road ended altogether. It shot upwards over the little rise, ending in barricades of wire and petrol cans and old sea-worn notices that had once spelled in brighter red "*Attention: Pont coupé.*"

Beyond, a narrow estuary, tidal, filling now with the scum of incoming sea, cut him off from the higher coast, and he stood looking down at what remained of the bridge—two lines of old black

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tooth-stumps, crusted by weed and mussels in the sand. The estuary gave onto a little bay, sheltered from the west by a point of rock: and then beyond, the repeated dazzling dunes of sand.

He sat down, lazy in the strong sea-air, glad to be cheated of the walk along the coast. He had not come to France for walking; he was happy to absorb sea and sun and sand, eat a thousand *langoustes*, a thousand *langoustines*, and sleep, with no one to worry him, every day.

He had been shot down over Lorient a day or two before the invasion began. He had been wounded in the left shoulder. Partisans had taken care of him for a week or two, grim, high-spirited and very kind, and his first thought, after the war, had been to go back to them. He had wandered later all through the coast country about here trying to find his unit in a countryside littered with abrupt, tired, severe notices saying "No: we do *not* know where your unit is." All of it now seemed a million years away.

He would not have known the girl coming up the road, five minutes later, if it had not been for Madame Dupont's description of her: a white sun-dress with a red coat that could be slipped off. She had taken off the coat and was carrying it in her hand.

She too stood looking down at the little estuary, the bay, and the remains of the bridge, the wind filling and beating the skirt of her dress, so that she held it down with her free hand.

"The bridge is cut," he said. He spoke in French and for a moment she did not reply.

Then she said, with a curious repetitive flatness that he could not explain as either ironical or bored:

"Yes: the bridge is cut."

She stared across the bay, lips full, thrust outward, almost pouting. It was true, as Madame Dupont said, that she was a big girl, big and round, with sallow skin and fine full arms; but her eyes, like her voice, were flat and unresponsive. Sea-light seemed to have pulled over the deep brown pupils a thin, opaque blind.

He stood for a second or two not knowing what to say and then he remarked that, below, the little bay was very beautiful.

Yes, it was very beautiful, she said: flatly again, as if, perhaps, it were a stretch of corrugated iron.

There was probably a road round the estuary, he said, if she thought of walking on.

She said: yes, there was probably a road round the estuary: as if neither she nor anyone could possibly care.

Quite suddenly she turned and began to walk back down the road to the hotel. He watched her for some minutes and then began to walk back too. Half-way there the wind blew cool again,

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whining and moaning under the pines, and the girl put on the little scarlet coat as she walked along.

That evening the *patron* came to the table, as he always did, and said, "Tonight, sir, Mister Harris m'sieu, we have on the menu to eat a nice *potage*, a broth, and then some local fish cooked *en fenouille*, and afterwards a piece of meat, *bifteck*, cooked in butter. It is all right? You find it?"

He would find it excellent, Harris answered, and at the *bifteck* Madame Dupont said:

"The girl is still alone. She is wearing quite a nice dress, dark blue and white. It does well with that dark hair of hers."

"You have butter on your chin, Monsieur Harris," Jean-Pierre said, and Harris licked the running butter away with his tongue.

"Their name is Michel. I found it from Madame. He is something in automobiles in Paris. Quite well off, I think, too."

"Are they married?"

"They are father and daughter."

"Then why do you suppose the father isn't there?"

"Because he has gone to Paris," Madame Dupont said. "He is like so many other gentlemen. He has *affaires* in Paris and he will come here, no doubt, for the *wickend*."

"Have you seen him before?"

"I don't know," Madame Dupont said. "I am not sure. Somehow there is a little feeling I have seen him somewhere."

In the evenings there was nothing to do but sit on the terrace and, in the darkness, watch the awakening of light across the bay. The long sea-strong days made him very sleepy and by ten o'clock, most evenings, he was too tired to keep awake and fell asleep at once in his small attic bed. In the hotel *salon*, games of bridge at tables of green baize went on until midnight; and in the bar below plaintive French songs, on records, with dancing, beat into the wave-lapped night air for an hour or two longer.

That night he did not fall asleep. With sunset the wind across the bay had died. In the still air the gramophone from below thumped like the heavy throbbing of a sardine boat setting out to sea.

It seemed as if, for an hour, the same tune was played over and over again. He got up and looked at his watch. He shook it several times to make sure that half past nine, and not, as he thought, half past ten, was the time it showed. Across the bay, at the headland, a navigation light flashed green and red. Below on the terrace, there was still a noise of spoons in coffee saucers.

It suddenly came to him that, in a moment of sleepiness, he had made a mistake of an hour in the time. He dressed and went downstairs. There was much knitting by French *mesdames* in the lounge, and outside, under arbours of plane leaves, a few people

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were still drinking, served by a waiter who in moments of idleness stared out at a dreamy milk-calm sea. In the bar a few others were dancing, the windows open for air, the gramophone filling the room with the beat of the same hot sweet tune he had heard upstairs.

In the bar he found the girl: but not dancing.

She was sitting alone on a high stool at the bar, playing with a few dark-golden grains of sugar in a coffee spoon.

"Would you dance?" he said.

She held up her arms, not speaking, without a smile. The sleeves of her dress, dark blue, were long, ending in cuffs that clipped together with small white shells. The stuff of the dress was some light crêpe-like material through which, as they danced, he could feel her skin, smooth and blood-warm and unencumbered.

She danced mechanically, smoothly, staring over his shoulder: either as if she were deep in thought or not thinking at all. He asked her once if she knew the name of the French tune that now, as before, the gramophone kept playing over and over again, but she shrugged her shoulders, whether because she did not understand or because she did not know he never discovered.

After the third or fourth dance he experienced a curious feeling. A latent boredom began to creep up through his mind; a kind of soft fungus of drowsiness rising from the same dance, the same tune, the same mechanical rhythm of her body—as if she had done all this and done it as silently, as beautifully and as efficiently with a hundred men like him before. He felt it over-hot in the little bar. He began to dislike the haunting, repetitive little tune.

A smell of sea-air, fresh and salt, came in lightly through the open window, and suddenly he felt he wanted to be outside, watching the bay-lights, walking by the sea.

"Shall we walk?" he said.

Her response to the idea of walking was exactly as it had been to the idea of dancing. Not speaking, again without a smile, she walked in her anonymous way into the darkness ahead of him. He followed her and, side by side, they began to walk along the little curving esplanade. For a time street lights at regular intervals lit up purple and scarlet beds of verbena and geraniums, rows of striped bathing huts, blue and brown boats upturned on white sand.

And then, soon, the last of the light had gone. The sea grew dark, with a white fringe of miniature summer waves, a few black rocks in white sand; it was all wonderfully quiet after the bright noises of the bar.

Half a mile farther on they stopped by the sea-wall and looked out to where, over the bay, it was possible now to see the lights of the lower port, the green and scarlet flashes of naviga-

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tion points, the trail of a sardine fleet making for open water.

He watched for a few moments and then, casually, he turned to kiss her. He thought for a moment he had made a hasty and blundering attempt at it because, as he came close to her, she turned her face away. And then suddenly he knew that she was simply offering her cheek, formally, in the conventional French way.

"Not that way," he said and began to turn her towards him, kissing her full on the mouth. He felt a great start of quickened response flare up through her body that, from her breast downward, seemed to have nothing covering it but the flimsy stuff of the dress.

Like one of the navigation lights pricking the darkness, the start of her body flared up and went out again. She seemed to kill it and then hold herself away.

He stood for some moments tracing with one finger, slightly puzzled, the line of her long arm and the bare curve of one shoulder. She had taken up a half-crouching attitude, leaning forward on the wall, looking at the sea.

"How long do you stay here?" he said.

"Until the hot weather is finished. It is very hot in Paris now."

"Do you live in Paris?"

"I live in Paris."

"Do you like it here?" he said. "Do you swim?"

"Yes. I swim," she said.

There was something increasingly curious, he thought, about that repeated formality, the flashing start of feeling, the sudden ending of it, the holding away. He felt that behind it, behind all the soft correctness of tone, a disturbed moment of high feeling, of anguish in heat or even anger, might suddenly flare out if he touched her again.

"Perhaps you would like to swim tomorrow?" he said. "With me."

"I would like it. Thank you."

"What time? At half past ten? Before lunch?" he said.

"Before lunch: yes."

He began to explain to her about the sand in front of the hotel. The wash of the tide covered it with ugly splintered grey shell. He suddenly remembered the smaller bay, at the estuary, where the bridge was broken, that he had seen that afternoon.

"Would you come there?" he said. "It's better."

"Yes: I will come there," she said.

For more than half the way back to the hotel she had nothing else to say. He did not kiss her again.

At a turn in the esplanade a brief curl of wind, like some afterthought from the breezy afternoon, caught her long hair and blew it, intensely black and beautiful, across her face. She stopped to

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pin it back ; and standing there, in the half-light of the first esplanade lamp forty yards away, she addressed him for the first time with a question of her own.

"How long do you stay here ? "

He laughed. " As long as the money lasts."

" You don't know ? "

" No."

He had not given it serious thought. He had been able to bring about seventy pounds—all that was left of his precious magnificent gratuity, all he had. After that had gone he hadn't a penny, not a prospect, not the remotest idea of a plan or a job.

" When there's no more money you go home ? "

" That's it."

" You must be careful with your money," she said.

In the morning they lay in the sun, below dunes of scorching sand, beyond the estuary. A wind had risen with customary freshness after sunrise and it seemed to keep off the heat of a brilliant day. But it was the wind, he knew, that burnt. He was torn between telling her to cover her body for comfort's sake and letting her leave it there, magnificent and full, breast and loins held in nothing but simple triangles of sea-green, long hair blue-black on her full ripe shoulders, so that he could take his fill of watching it.

Finally he reached for her sun-wrap. She was lying full-stretched on sea-whitened sand, her skin almost as pale. " You ought to put this on," he said. " The sun will burn you."

She turned over, her flanks picking up star-like grains of sand, one breast dipping and taking up with its heavy tautness a coat of the same shimmering particles of whiteness ; and in a moment he felt himself fired and trembling and began to kiss her. Her mouth, now, came full to him at once, without hesitation. Her hair fell across his face and with a long slow arm she brushed it away and then let the arm curl across his back. He felt the five needles of her fingers nicking down the bone of his spine, clenched, holding him in still frenzy.

An afternoon of indigo and snow-white brilliance blew in exhilarating bursts of wind that flowered into occasional whirlwinds of sand. Above the dunes there was a tossing and continuous murmur of pines. Waves lashed with glittering and exciting brilliance the rocks of the small point, and sometimes it was too hot, and then too cool, to lie on naked sand in the sun.

That afternoon he discovered her name ; it was Yvonne, but he did not trouble about the rest. Michel or something, Madame Dupont had said.

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It was Friday; and he said something just before they returned to the hotel, about her father coming back for the week-end. Whether, in the crash of waves and the general dazzling exhilaration of sea and sun and wind, she did not hear quite what he said, or whether she was really not listening or not wanting to listen, he did not know. But it was not until they were walking back along the road that she answered him:

"Yes: he is coming back tomorrow."

"Until when?"

"He will go back to Paris on Monday."

He remembered the little short-sighted dapper man who could not read the menu; the flower in the buttonhole; a certain touch of obedient filial care about her attitude towards him at table. And it did not surprise him when she said:

"I will have to be with him. He likes me to be with him. All the time."

"I understand."

That evening they danced in the bar and walked, afterwards, along dark calm sands. Under stars of tense brilliance, to a barely audible splash of tiny waves, she kissed him several times and said:

"Please don't talk to me when he is here. It isn't for long. Two days. But he likes to walk with me. And play cards in the evenings. You know. That sort of thing."

"I know," he said. That night, as she put it, it did not seem very long.

Next day, for lunch, there were *langoustines*. He ate six. Jean-Pierre set up a commotion of mocking:

"Monsieur Harris doesn't eat his food! Monsieur Harris doesn't eat his food! How many *langoustines*?"

"I think I'm getting tired of *langoustines*."

"When you take things on your plate you have to eat them!"

Madame Dupont flashed her spectacles:

"I see the girl's father has come back. She always puts a flower in his buttonhole."

He did not turn to look; and Jean-Pierre said:

"If you don't eat your *langoustines* you can't come to the *pardon* tomorrow."

"It is the greatest *pardon* of all tomorrow," Madame Dupont said. "You should see it. You should come with us."

"Please!" the boy said. "Please!"

"We are hiring a car," Madame Dupont said. "There will be plenty of room for you if you care to come."

There was nothing else to do; and he spent most of Sunday roaming about with the boy and the governess on a high crowded

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hill full of the shrieks of a fair-ground and the droning of unending priestly incantations.

All day a great throng of surplices, like fat, flapping moths, swarmed about the big grey church. Bishops in yellow robes led a whole hillside of peasant faces in moaning and singing and ceaseless prayer. At the foot of the hillside drunken orgies started between alley-ways of fair-stalls. From the top of the hill, a vast bay of sand, clear and superbly cleansed by weedless tides, stretched curving away against miles of bright blue ocean.

And looking at it, thinking of the other, smaller bay, and of the girl's body taking to it like a magnet the golden grains of sand, he felt pained by an ache of sudden anguish for her. He was smitten with grey loneliness, made worse by the dry, wearying incantations, the shrill callings-down from heaven. He felt sickened by people. He wanted no one near him but the girl, on the burning shore or in the calm darkness of the other bay.

That afternoon Madame Dupont bought many hideous tinsel statuettes of saints and Jean-Pierre ate *pommes frites* from a paper bag and at five o'clock they drove home.

Always, on Sundays, the hotel was crowded. French boys played accordions and sometimes guitars, with loud sweet tunes, on the esplanade. The gramophone blared all day from the bar.

He gave up the idea of drinking about nine o'clock and decided to go to bed. As he passed the *salon* he stopped and stood looking in through the partially curtained dividing windows. A few games of cards were being played. Lights fell across litters of cards and small piles of money on green baize tables and he saw the girl, upright, neutral-faced, very quiet, playing with her father; but whether she was bored, or tired, or simply unusually circumspect in her Sunday black evening dress he did not know. It struck him that she hardly looked at her partner, dapper with his long amber cigarette-holder, the flower in his buttonhole and his general French air of being the spruce, shrewd, successful man.

It was during that week, towards the end, that she saw, as they bathed, the scar on Harris' shoulder. It began a conversation not, as it turned out, so much about him as about herself.

Some time before this he had discovered that Madame Dupont had been wrong about her age; she had, perhaps, allowed for the fact that big supple girls are sometimes younger than they seem.

She was, after all, twenty-seven; and the conversation, for that reason, did not surprise him quite so much.

"I have been married," she said.

With an unpleasant choking sensation in his throat he lay looking at the sky. A sardine boat, chugging seawards about

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the point, seemed to travel for several miles before she spoke again.

"During the war," she said. "The scar reminded me. I wanted to tell you in any case."

"There was no need to tell me."

"You would have to find out," she said.

She seemed suddenly, because of this remark, to speak more easily. The sardine boat cleared the point, quickening up its engines in a stabbing series of coughing barks that broke sharply across the water.

"It was just for a day or two," she said. "That's all."

"The war?"

"Yes: a partisan." She spoke quickly. "Two or three nights of love—and then, out—pouff!—"

She did not go on, and now as he turned to her, looking at her face, he found it unexpectedly pained and hard, embittered almost to giving the illusion of being old.

"There was no need to tell me this," he said.

"You would find out in time," she said, and all of a sudden he felt all the fire of wanting her leap back, a sick central needle of pain. Her body, golden-grained with sand, rolled itself over to him, heavy with emotion, quivering to touch.

"You would know," she said. "You would have to know."

The days of the middle week, in this way, mounted like a castle in sand. By the estuary under hot white dunes, and then in the evenings along the deserted shore, to the sound of tiny waves that were not more than spilled echoes, the structure of it, hot and frenzied and delicate, was raised up. And each time the week-end, like the sea, swept in and bore it away.

By each Monday he felt that a dark ugly hole had been torn in his existence. Not merely had the bright insubstantial castle gone. Her other existence, like the sea, had torn deep under it, leaving only a ravaged, lacerating hole of loneliness. He began to hate the dapper, card-playing, flower-fop of a father who punctually came down every Saturday to perform, in his neat and neutrally precise way, the shattering extinction of everything beautiful the week had built up. He thought she hated it too.

On the following Friday, for the first time for several weeks, a squally wind brought an afternoon and then an evening of lashing cold rain. A squally touch of winter seemed suddenly to rip across the upturned tables of the terraces.

In the bar they had the customary dance or two, her body warm-pressed and supple against him as they went round and round to the familiar steel-worn tunes. But tonight the bar was full. Rain lashed at the windows and there would be no walking, he knew, to places made familiar by love along the deserted sand.

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It seemed as if she too was thinking of this.

"You could come to my room," she said.

For a moment in the bedroom, before undressing, she went to the window to make sure that it was shut and to pull the long chenille curtains. She could not find the cord that pulled the curtains together, and for the space of half a minute she put on the light. By the window, a coat-stand held her father's hat and a suit of cream alpaca he wore when walking arm-in-arm with the girl, jauntily swinging his silver-headed walking-stick, on Sunday afternoons.

She saw him look at it. "He left them to be cleaned," she said.

At intervals he lay listening to cold rain beating with light flashes on the sea-exposed window beyond the heavy curtains. To his surprise, some time later, he turned and found her face, as he moved to touch it with his mouth, wet with tears.

"Why are you crying? What is it?" he said. "What is it?"

"I am thinking of the time when you will be gone," she said. "I can't bear that time—"

He held her face with his hands, and, as she cried, a dark accumulation of all that he felt at each week-end, the dry dead misery of being alone, deprived of her, gave him a sudden bitter foretaste of what he knew, in time, would have to come.

But it was only briefly. It was early August now; there would still be four, even five or six weeks of summer. Then he asked himself what would happen if the weather broke. And once more, afraid and hateful, he listened to the rain beating with its almost wintry harshness across the bay.

"Supposing the summer breaks up?"

"We shall stay now. I have told him I want to stay—" He could hear by her voice that she had stopped crying. She was restrained and quiet again and his fear of losing her, always uppermost in his mind rather than any thought of going away himself, stopped now too.

In the morning his fear was renewed and twisted round. He discovered, as he paid his weekly bill at the hotel desk, that he had somehow made a miscalculation in his money. At the beginning of his holiday he had seemed to be so rich in travellers' cheques that he had really never bothered to count them carefully. The weeks had stretched deliciously ahead. Now, it seemed, he had ten pounds less than he had bargained for. It meant going home a week, perhaps two weeks, earlier than he had calculated.

She was curiously indifferent about these fears. His Englishness revolted against and was troubled by a calculation that had gone wrong. He was worried by the new post-war fear of having no money in a foreign country. "By the end of next week I'll have no francs left—nothing at all."

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"I have francs. I can get you francs."

"But I could never pay them back."

"Who wants you to pay them back?" she said. "Who wants it? Who cares?"

In his English way he was bothered by a possible failure to do something correctly. It wasn't exactly a question of dishonesty; it was not quite the game. For her, on the other hand, war had killed the meaning, if she had ever understood it in the same way, of all such phrases. Nobody bothered about that sort of thing any longer.

"I will get you francs at the week-end. All the francs you wish."

"I couldn't possibly pay you back—"

"Please," she said. "All the money in France is black market money. Nobody is honest any longer. Who cares?"

He did not know what to answer.

"Everybody has given up worrying about these things. Everybody has to live—"

And after all, it seemed, when she spoke like that, very easy. She could get a little each week for him. And in that way he could stay on.

"And I want you to stay on," she said. "I want it so much. I don't want you to go—"

"I don't know," he said. "Somehow—"

"But it's easy, it's so easy," she said. "And if you don't take it you have to go—"

"I know, I know," he said.

"Then if you know and it's so easy why do you make it so difficult?"

He could not explain. All that he felt about being kept by a woman sounded priggish and adolescent and horribly and smugly English. And yet there was something about being kept—

"I love you," she said. "Please do it for that. Please. You will do it for that, won't you?" Well, all right, he said, he would do it for that. He would do it for love.

And then she had a sudden thought. It seemed to occur to her that for him it was really, after all, nothing but a matter of pride, and she said:

"I will put it in a letter. Every Saturday I will write you a little letter and tell you how I love you and the money will be in it."

He laughed. "You think of clever things," he said.

"Only because I love you."

"The more you love the cleverer you get?" he said. "Is that it?"

"Of course," she said. "Every woman knows that is what happens—"

And so every Saturday morning, before breakfast, he would

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find her letter with the hotel porter, and inside it enough francs to take him through the week, and with the francs a little note, brief and tender, about how she loved him and how she was happy now because, with the money, he could stay a little longer.

He took the note away to read on the shore, before he swam, and in the fine exquisite air he lost his fear.

"The season will soon be ending," Madame Dupont said. "There is always a horrible rush about the fifteenth and then by the end of the month it begins to thin out a little."

"Do you have *langoustines* in England?" the boy said.

"No: no *langoustines* in England."

"You have peaches?"

"Yes: peaches."

"Yesterday I had a big fat animal in a peach. The biggest one I ever had. Pink like a *langouste*, with a black head—"

"I shall be sick!" Madame Dupont said, and buried her face, with its flashing spectacles, in her hands.

After all the weather had not broken. The single day and night of gusting rain had been followed by skies of pure washed blue, exquisite and brilliant: by afternoons of burning indigo breeziness, bringing a saltiness that Harris could taste on the face of the girl as he touched it with his mouth. Her body had become a deep butter-golden brown in the sun.

By the second week in September he began to experience once again the fear that soon it would all be over. The blue dishes of *langoustines*, the shrill voice of Jean-Pierre discovering maggots in the peaches, Madame Dupont's unwearying spectacles; the hot afternoons by the estuary, the darkening evenings along the shore.

She too seemed to realize it and along the shore, on a dark humid September evening, said to him:

"I wanted to tell you something about myself," and went on at once: "It was about being married—"

Listening, not interrupting her, he watched the many navigation lights flowing emerald and white and crimson across the bay. She, too, after all, it seemed, had been one of his partisans. In four years she had helped nearly two hundred men.

During all the time she spoke of this there was a flatness in her voice that reminded him of the evening he had first walked with her by the sea. She had once again pulled down that opaque blind between them; as if she were keeping something back.

And then she began to talk of another man. A French boy, a young man from Orléans. An eager brilliant boy who when war broke out had been studying for a degree in engineering and then, late in the war, had become a partisan too. "He had a wonderful

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face," she kept saying. "Such wonderful brilliant eyes. So intelligent and beautiful."

After she had known him a few weeks they had been given an assignment, quite a difficult one, seventy or eighty miles north of Marseilles, and suddenly, under all the impulse of war and the emotion of war, they decided to get married before attempting it. They were married in his own village, somewhere south of Paris, and afterwards they set out on bicycles. That was their honeymoon: sleeping in barns, under haystacks, sometimes in small hotels, sometimes in the houses of other partisans.

It had been very beautiful, she said, and as she spoke of it he could hear once again the restrictive quietness of unspent tears in her voice, making it flat and terribly calm.

On the second night of the journey as she bicycled downhill in darkness, she missed the road, crashing the bicycle into a bank, buckling it beyond repair. They hid it in a barn so that he could come back for it. Then they rode on together on one bicycle, she on the cross-bar. And all that night the feeling of being close to the young eager boy grew deeper, until in that exciting, secret and almost funny situation she felt they were inseparable. Here she spoke again of his face, saying how brilliant and beautiful it was.

And then the cross-bar of the second bicycle broke; and they went on to complete the rest of the assignment on foot, quite successfully as it turned out, except that the boy, going back two days later in the hope of picking up at least one of the bicycles, had himself been picked up by waiting Gestapo.

After three months they sent him back. "There was not much left of his face," she said. Her voice had a stony, barren sound. "I did not know him from his face. It was not there." He died a week or two later.

Pride and anger and tenderness for her flooded up like her own unspent tears through his heart, confusing and hurting him, so that he could not speak again.

"I did not sleep for a year," she said. "I felt I could never sleep again."

He did not answer.

"Something was taken away and has not come back," she said.

A light run of breeze brought a few sharper, more crested waves across the bay. He heard her say how beautiful the evening was, how you could still imagine it was full summer. For some moments longer he listened to a sardine boat chuffing and coughing away to sea and then to her voice reminding him, at last, still with its dry stony pain, that in a week he would be listening to it all no longer.

"Did you mind that I told you all that?" she said.

"No: I'm glad you told me."

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" Sometimes you make me think of him. The same feeling comes. I'm happy again."

His own happiness and anguish for her kept him quiet and after she had said, in a sentence he did not understand and did not ask to have explained, " There are things that can kill you like that, unless you find someone in their place," they walked back arm-in-arm to the hotel.

" One has to live," she said.

The following day at lunch there were *langoustines*, and Madame Dupont, cracking away with neat relish above a pile of shells, stared through her spectacles to where, at the table by the window, the girl was threading the customary flower into the dapper buttonhole.

" It was only today I discovered from Madame Prideaux who he is."

Before Harris could answer the *patron* came to the table to say : " I know you do not like the liver, Monsieur Harris—so if you prefer it we have today for you a piece of meat. A *bifteck*. If you find it all right ? "

" Excellent," Harris said. The *patron* smiled and patted Jean-Pierre on the head and walked away. Madame Dupont stared critically, with a kind of dry prudery, through her spectacles. Jean-Pierre said he would be glad when the peaches came and Madame Dupont, holding the lobster-pincers poised under her chin, said :

" He was at La Baule the summer before the war. With another girl."

" Another daughter ? "

" I remembered him very well the moment Madame Prideaux reminded me."

The noon wind was springing up, deepening the sea to flashing brilliant indigo, across the bay.

" Daughter ? " Madame Dupont said. " She is somebody's daughter, yes. They are all somebody's daughter."

In the dining-room there was a swift breath of fish, hot in butter, and richly, thickly, with nausea, it clotted Harris's throat.

" It's a fine game," she said. " I suppose you find it in England too ? I suppose one finds it everywhere."

He sent the fish away.

" Nor me ! " the boy said. " Nor me. I hate it ! "

" You must eat fish," Madame Dupont said. " It gives brains."

" No ! "

" It gives brains, doesn't it, Monsieur Harris ? He must eat it."

" Monsieur Harris doesn't eat it."

" Monsieur Harris is old enough to please himself what he has and what he doesn't have. Aren't you, Monsieur Harris ? "

" Yes," he said.

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"You must eat and grow big and get lots of brains," she said, "so that you can please yourself what you do."

Across the bay the rising breeze from the open sea carried deeper sparkling furrows broadside along the shore. A blue sardine boat, like an ark, shone with its climbing crimson sail tightening against the long promontory by blue-black pines.

"After all she has to live," Madame Dupont said. She smiled with dry tolerance, her mouth twisted, her eyes narrowed like the eyes of an old watchful matriarch behind her spectacles. "They all have to live."

Harris, eating his beefsteak, stared blindly across the bay.

"She knows how to make a fuss of an old man like that. And after all the old man wants to live—"

"Fuss, fuss!" the boy said.

"Quiet!" Madame Dupont said. "Take what fruit you want, Jean-Pierre, and eat it."

Harris, staring across the sea, thought of the boy who had died, the something that had been taken away from the girl and that he hoped, in a sense, he might have given back. Suddenly it seemed that the other shore of the bay was very far away. It quivered and receded in the bristling air of noon.

And staring at it he realized that he had never, all this time, been across the bay. He had never been across to the other side.

It was too late now and as he sat thinking of the girl's dark hair blowing across her face, the rain beating on the windows and the suit of cream alpaca hanging in the bedroom, he remembered the stony barren pain of her face and the things that would kill.

"I have a big one!" the boy said. "Look! Look at that!"

Harris looked away from the sea to where Jean-Pierre, splitting a gold-pink peach in halves, was prodding, with the point of his fruit knife, a trundling fat maggot that had fattened on the blood-brown shining heart of flesh.

"Kill it! Kill it!" Madame Dupont said. "Put it away! Take it out of my sight. I can't bear it! For God's sake put it out of my sight!"

All across the bay the sea flashed with its deep noon beauty and in the dining-room Madame Dupont, quite pale behind her golden spectacles, buried her face in her hands.

* * *

DOUBLE ENTENDRE

"Men were made to listen as well as talk," Lady Bellair is said to have remarked to Count D'Orsay.

"Without doubt," replied the Count, "for Nature has given us two ears, but only one mouth."

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KILLER IN THE PASS

Man was food, prey to be stalked

by H. G. EVARTS

NANKA TAL stirred under his blanket, shivering in the dawn's bitter chill, and raised his head to listen. It came again, the thin, quavering sound—half howl and half cry—that had wakened him; then it faded away on a lingering, mournful note. For fully another minute he lay motionless, all his senses alert, but he heard only the moan of the wind outside. He got to his feet unsteadily, rubbing his eyes, threw a shell into the chamber of his rifle, and pushed open the door of the hut.

A blast of cold air whipped his face and he blinked against it, peering out at the bleak frozen mass of Rongbar La. The snow, scoured by constant winds here on the summit of the pass, lay only a few inches deep, but the drifts on either slope covered the trail, higher than a man's head. It had taken Nanka Tal two days to climb up through those drifts from the village, a climb that in any other winter he could have made in several hours—a climb that had left him weak and light-headed.

This sound, now—he could not be sure whether it was real or part of some evil, half-remembered dream. Hunger did that to a man, confused him and slowed his responses so that the simplest things often seemed complex. He could see his own tracks where he had stumbled up the pass the night before, and he could see the tracks of a blue sheep, made perhaps a week ago, but otherwise the white expanse had been swept clean by the last storm.

"Wind," he muttered. "Nothing but wind." And he tramped back into the hut, which, in happier times, had been the refuge of a holy lama.

Laying his rifle on a ledge, he stamped into his boots and buckled on his knife, and scrubbed his face with a handful of snow. Every movement was an effort and he leaned against the rock wall of the hut, panting and dizzy, until the pounding in his chest subsided. But a fierce exultation gripped him. Where there was one sheep, there would be others. They might be higher up the peak and difficult to find, but this time he would return with meat for Rongbar village.

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For a moment he let himself think of Rura, his wife, and Ladar, his five-year-old son, of their blue, pinched faces and their dull, haunted eyes. This the Chinese had done, the Red bandits who had invaded Tibet the summer before—stolen the grain and butchered the yaks and seized the guns, all but this one. One rifle to a village and fifty rounds of ammunition, they had said; then they had marched away and left the village to starve. Nanka Tal groaned aloud. This time he could not fail, for he would not have the strength to try again.

He reached into the leather bag on his belt, fingering his last three strips of dried horse meat, and drew one out. It was small and rank-smelling, mostly sinew and gristle, but it was food and he had not eaten since the previous noon. He felt saliva gather in his mouth, felt the queasy gnawing of his stomach, and he clenched his teeth together as he dropped the meat back into the bag. One piece a day he had allowed himself, one for each day of the hunt. There would be no more in his house if he came back empty-handed. He could do without a little longer.

Throwing his sheepskin cloak over his shoulders, he stepped out into the snow to look at the weather. He was a tall, lean young man, hollow-cheeked and sunken-eyed, with fatigue lines deep in his bony face. The sheep prints caught his eye, and he moved towards them, reminded of milder winters when game had been plentiful and meat abundant in every family's pot. There had been antelope and deer to shoot, bears to trap, rabbits and pheasants to snare.

Now, in this harshest winter of a lifetime, the game was fleeing south to warmer, sheltered valleys. Only the blue sheep remained, and they had retreated to the mountain-tops where no hunter could safely follow.

The tracks led upward. Nanka Tal hesitated and climbed the last few steps to the saddle of the pass. A gust of wind swooped down and he drew his cloak tight about him and crouched in the lee of the shrine. It loomed above him like a wall, a squarish, seven-foot mound of loose rock and stone, erected there by the same pious, long-forgotten lama, but the remnant of a prayer-flag still fluttered at the top of its flagpole.

Grimly Nanka Tal said, "*Hla ragellah*. To the gods." And he flipped a pebble onto the pile. He would need the gods today.

His glance followed the tracks to a snow-bank and he caught his breath as a vulture flapped away in alarm. Puzzled, he walked over to a half-buried carcass and kicked its rib cage. Fragments of shattered bone were scattered all about, and he uncovered the horns of a ram. What he did not grasp at first was how it had died; then he noticed the other tracks that angled off the crest of the ridge.

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They were fresh and they were big, bigger than those of any mastiff, but the cupped footpads were strangely like a dog's. He knelt down to study them, uneasy now as well as curious, for if the cry had been a dream, these were undeniably real. He felt a momentary relief that his senses had not deceived him, and then cold fear tingled along his spine. It could not be, and yet his instinct said it must be so, although he had never seen one. "*Kang-schang*," he whispered. "Snow wolf!"

Close to panic, he turned to run for his rifle, and halted. Squatting on its haunches, an old dog wolf was blocking his path to the hut. Its battle-scarred coat was dingy white against the snow and its yellow eyes returned Nanka Tal's stare with a shimmering intensity. Nanka Tal ran his tongue over his lips and took one step forward as he drew his knife, but the wolf did not yield ground.

He had heard old men tell of the *kang-schang*, who swarmed down from the northern plains in the worst of winters, preying on game and slaughtering everything before them, wolves so huge and fearless they sometimes attacked armed caravans. Like the Chinese bandits, he thought; vultures, scavengers who stripped a land of food. In wild, impulsive anger he scooped up snow, packed it into a ball, and hurled it at the wolf.

The wolf jumped aside and sat down again in the same position of wary patience, its brushy tail switching to and fro. Its flanks and belly were gaunt. This one has come to hunt our sheep, Nanka Tal thought. His legs began to tremble uncontrollably. Somehow he had to reach his gun.

A step at a time, he backed away, his eyes fixed on the silent, watchful wolf. He reached the base of the shrine and was edging round behind it when the wolf suddenly sprang and charged across the snow.

Nanka Tal saw the open jaws, saw the gleaming yellow teeth, and terror held him for one awful instant. Then he jumped for the platform of rocks and hoisted himself up one side by his arms. The wolf leaped, slashing at his boot, but Nanka Tal jerked up both legs and sprawled over the top, beyond immediate reach. The wolf made a second snarling leap, fell back, and settled on its haunches at the foot of the shrine.

Nanka Tal snatched up a stone and threw it and missed, and threw again, but the wolf trotted off some distance. Nanka Tal waited then, watching, and lowered his arm when the wolf stretched out with its head between its paws. He glanced round at the open door of the hut, fifty paces away, and considered his chances. The wolf might be old, but it was faster than a big horned ram, faster by far than Nanka Tal, and it was ravenous. Otherwise it would

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not have returned to gnaw at fleshless bones where the scent of man was so strong.

Now it had learned that this man was harmless. This man was food, prey to be stalked.

Squinting against the snow glare, Nanka Tal squatted on his rocky perch. It was cramped, no more than six feet square, but the sides were too steep and too high for any wolf to scale. Eventually the wolf might tire of waiting and go away, but Nanka Tal could not wait. The wolf was concerned only with its hunger.

Nanka Tal had a wife, a son, and a village of twenty souls dependent on him. Without him to bring food, some of them would not live to see the snow melt from the passes in the spring.

His fingers tightened on his leather bag. Quivering with excitement, he pulled out a chunk of meat and sank his teeth into it. The smell teased his nostrils and he almost choked on the first bite. The wolf gave a whimpering growl and stood up, its ears pricked and its pink tongue drooling. Nanka Tal paused in his chewing and sighed. He had been thinking with his stomach instead of his head. Hunger had brought the *kang-schang* here and hunger would be its finish.

He searched on the shrine until he found a large, smooth rock to his liking. He gripped it in his fist and tossed his half-chewed bit of meat onto the snow below. The wolf stiffened and wrinkled its nose, sniffed the air, and slunk forward. Nanka Tal drew a long breath and cocked his arm, but the motion distracted the wolf. It made two cautious circuits around him at a safe distance, then lunged in close. Nanka Tal threw, aiming for the head, but the wolf swerved nimbly and he overshot. Before he could seize another rock, it had darted in and raced away with the meat in its jaws.

Tears welled up in Nanka Tal's eyes and he shook his head angrily, ashamed of his weakness. He had been a fool to leave his rifle behind, even for a second, a fool to imagine he could brain this brute with a rock. He had tricked only himself, and wasted a third of his meat. The thought of food wrenched him like a pain, and he bit down hard on his lip.

The wolf finished licking itself, threw back its head, and howled. Nanka Tal listened to the unearthly dying tremor and shook his fist in a spasm of rage. "Cry, you devil, cry!" he shouted. "You haven't got me yet!"

The wolf moved in nearer, bolder now, to resume its watch. Nanka Tal ran the ball of his thumb over his knife blade, rammed the knife back in its sheath and crouched down on a rock. The morning sun had laid a wicked dazzle upon the snow and the

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farther peaks sparkled along the horizon, but in the valley below he could barely distinguish the outline of the village. At that distance it appeared deserted, dead, and no sound reached him across the vast, icebound silence.

He was used to solitude, to the empty brooding desolation, but today it mocked him. No help would come. He had been too proud to admit that he might fail, so he had climbed the pass alone. If he did not return within a week, they might begin to wonder, and organize a search—those who were still able to walk—for the village needed his rifle, whether Nanka Tal lived or died. There were only the wolf and himself, waiting each other out.

A new sound, faint and far away, drifted along the ridge and lost itself against the cliffs, rousing Nanka Tal from his stupor. He strained forward and held his breath, listening intently. The wolf pointed its muzzle into the wind and howled again, as though in reply. Nanka Tal understood. The wolf was calling to its mate.

He wiped a hand over his eyes and looked down at the hut. Whatever he did he must do now, at once, before another wolf came. He could not sit here any longer in the numbing cold. He had no fuel for a fire, not even a few twigs with which to warm himself. He glanced at the staff of the prayer-flag; then he wrenched it loose from the rocks and tested it across his knee.

Working with feverish haste, he cut two strips of sheepskin from the bottom of his cloak and bound the handle of his knife to the tip of the pole to make a sort of crude spear. Stretched out on the snow, the wolf had been watching him through half-closed eyes, and now it got to its feet and began to pace nervously back and forth. Nanka Tal drew the smaller of the two pieces of meat from his bag and flung it down beside the sheep's carcass.

"Now," he said, "let us see how brave you are."

The wolf sidled in cautiously and stopped a length away from the meat. Nanka Tal dropped to the snow, braced his back against the cairn, and thrust out the spear. For some while they stood face to face, measuring each other, before Nanka Tal drove forward. He made a lunging stab, but the wolf jumped clear of the blade and twisted away.

Nanka Tal spun round to meet its rush, tripped over a rock, and fell heavily on his face. He groped frantically for the knife and dropped it with a scream as pain flared along his leg. Kicking with his other leg, he broke the wolf's grip on his boot, rolled over, and staggered to his feet.

The wolf attacked again, ripping at his cloak, but Nanka Tal reached the shrine in two long strides and pulled himself up.

His blood made a bright stain on the snow, but it seemed too

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great an effort to examine his wound. He sank down and closed his eyes, listening to the wolf munching his meat.

First his rifle and now his knife. A hunter so careless of his weapons deserved to die, but dying was too easy. If he died, then Ladar too would die, and a man who left no son behind would be lost and nameless for all eternity. For the sake of his boy, and for Rura, who had given him heart when he needed it most, he could not surrender to despair.

A shadow brushed across his upturned face and he sat up with a start. A lone vulture that had been hovering above him on outspread wings climbed in a widening spiral and flew off. Nanka Tal shuddered. The vulture too was hungry, impatient for him to die, not even waiting for the last sign of life to drain away. He was caught between them: the wolf below and the obscene eater of carrion above. One or the other would strip his bones, as they had stripped the sheep before him.

He looked down at the carcass. Now the female had joined the dog wolf and was restlessly circling the shrine, whining and scratching at the snow. She was smaller than her mate, darker and quicker of movement, but just as gaunt in rib and flank. Presently she prowled off to sniff inside the hut and backed out of the door, tugging at Nanka Tal's blanket. Again and again she slashed it with her teeth until she had satisfied herself that it was nothing to eat; then she came back to lie beside the male.

Nanka Tal eyed them appraisingly. They were more intelligent than any animals of his experience, almost human in their cunning and persistence. If he had time to learn their habits, he might devise a way to trap them, but now he had to guess. He had to find their weakness, as they had found his.

Taking out his last piece of meat, he chewed it in half and tossed one piece out in front of them. They got to their feet together, the dog bristling its ruff and snarling, but the female sprang first. She yelped as the dog wolf nipped one hind leg and turned to snap at him, but he cuffed her aside and jumped ahead to snatch up the meat. She leaped upon him in savage fury and they rolled over and over. But the moment Nanka Tal started to climb down, they stopped fighting and ran back to the foot of the pile.

Nanka Tal dragged up his feet. He had learned something. But could he use the knowledge to help himself? His leg had begun to throb, his eyes ached from the glare of the sun, and hunger was becoming a torment. If he could not kill one wolf, it was certain that he could not kill two. To escape from this trap, he had to lure them both away.

He searched the pile for another stone, and picked up a small,

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flat piece of slate upon which some devout worshipper had scratched the inscription: *Sacred Jewel of the Lotus.* Smiling wryly, Nanka Tal tied it to his last miserable scrap of meat and held it out for the wolves to smell. They jumped at his outstretched hand in a slavering frenzy, and he drew back his arm and sailed the stone in hard spinning flight far across the brow of the ridge and watched it curve out of sight.

The she-wolf raced off in the lead, with the dog in pursuit. Nanka Tal waited until they had disappeared; then he hopped down from the rocks. Limping across the snow, he picked up his knife and started for the hut. He stopped abruptly at an unexpected blur of movement along the ridge. The wolves were coming back already, charging down upon him with unbelievable speed. He had thrown as far as he could but it was not far enough. The wolves were as fast as they were wily. He fled back to the rocks and scrambled up.

Down by the hut, a third wolf rounded the corner and poked its snout into the open door, followed by its smaller mate. They jumped at Nanka Tal's yell and crouched, their ears back and their teeth bared. He stared at them in sick dismay, unable to move or think. There was for him only the thudding of his heart, the sour brassy taste in his mouth, the agony of failure.

The new pair approached the first two suspiciously, their blunt black noses smelling out the situation. The females sniffed each other and the dogs came shoulder to shoulder, stiff-legged and growling. Then, as though by reluctant consent, each couple squatted down on opposite sides of the shrine. Nanka Tal beat his fist into his palm. An hour ago there had been one wolf; now there were four. By sundown there might be a pack of fifteen or twenty, lured by his scent.

The running had re-opened his wound and the blood was a sticky trickle inside his boot. He stretched out his leg and rubbed snow over the gash. He had no more tricks, no more food. He had used it all and his bait was gone. The only bait was Nanka Tal, once the hunter of Rongbar village, husband of Rura, father of Ladar, who now had nothing to share but his hunger.

A speck high in the sky caught his eye and he watched it dully, then with frowning concentration. It seemed to be motionless, suspended in space, but he knew it was the vulture, and a hope, that had never quite died, stirred in his heart. An animal hunted by smell but a bird hunted by sight, and this one's vision was as keen as any hawk's. If he had the patience and the nerveless will to lure it down, there still might be a chance.

He lay back on the rocks, face up, and let his hands go slack at

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his sides. Through narrowed eyes, he watched the distant dot against the sky. The wind had died, the sun beat down from a cloudless sky, and sweat beaded along his lashes, dimming his sight, but he dared not brush it away. If he moved—so much as twitched a muscle—the vulture would take alarm, for it feared all creatures that were not carrion.

The wolves had stopped their fretful whining, and the stillness deepened around him. This was the craziness of hunger, to act as one already dead when death lay crouched only a few feet away. Hunger was the enemy. It was worse than thirst or heat or cold or pain because it fed upon itself, gaining strength while he grew weaker. He scarcely dared to breathe. He could only wait and pray that the vulture's hunger-craze was greater than its caution.

Then the bird glided back into his line of vision, low and black and large against the sun, its scrawny neck extended as it surveyed the scene below. With exquisite deliberation it hovered and dipped, making its decision; it planed away uncertainly and swung back, then swooped down to make a pass and swooped again to strike. Nanka Tal saw the hooked beak and the talons that were sharp enough to blind a man, and his throat tightened.

As the vulture settled on his chest with a ruffling of feathers, he reared up and grabbed it. He caught it first by the leg, then gripped its neck with both hands. The broad wings beat, struggling to lift Nanka Tal into the air, and the beak raked viciously at his face, but Nanka Tal held on. Gradually the thrashing subsided and the bird went limp in his grasp. Nanka Tal flopped the reeking carcass over beside him and gulped down the nausea that shook him.

All four wolves had closed in upon the shrine, their heads lifted and their eyes expectant, but it was the big brush-tail white, his first attacker, that Nanka Tal hated as he had never hated any living thing before. He stared down at the cruel, gaunt head.

"You would eat your mate, eat your own young," he said. "If all your breed are like you—they are not fit to live."

With his knife, he began to cut his sheepskin cloak into one-inch strips, glancing now and then along the ridge, where the second pair of wolves had come. Each strip he knotted to another until he had a rope of pliant leather. He doubled it back, bound the ends together, and doubled it again into a four-strand line some twelve feet long and as stout as he could make it. At one end he tied a slip-knot, fashioning a wide noose. Retching at the stench, he sliced a hunk of flesh from the vulture's breast.

Straightening wearily on top of the cairn, he gazed down at his valley, conscious of some atmospheric change. The wind had sprung up again but it blew from the south, not the north—a fresh warm breath that carried the feel of a thaw and coming spring. He

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touched the prayer beads around his neck. The gods could do no more. The rest was up to Nanka Tal.

He doubted that even a ravenous wolf could stomach vulture meat, but surely this one would try, greedy as it was. Carefully, he lowered his noose to the snow and dropped the piece of bait beside it. The white dog growled deep in its throat, its hindquarters gathered and its lips drawn back. The female jumped to her feet, but the dog sprang first, pouncing on the meat. Nanka Tal flipped the noose over its head and around its throat and heaved the slip-knot tight.

The wolf's backward leap almost jerked him off his feet, but Nanka Tal braced his heels against a rock and hung on with all his ebbing strength. The wolf pawed and tried to slash the rope with its teeth, but Nanka Tal snapped up its head, maintaining tension so the rope could not slip forward over its ears. The big white beast flung itself sideways, gasping and choking against the pressure of its own weight. Nanka Tal gave another upward jerk, and the wolf let out a wheezing cough and jumped again, with diminishing force.

The yellow eyes glazed over. The wolf dug in its feet and tugged, feebly now. Suddenly the noose went slack and Nanka Tal was holding a loose rope, but it had served its purpose for a few crucial seconds. The wolf gave one convulsive jerk and rolled over in the snow, not dead but strangled into temporary helplessness.

Nanka Tal relaxed his grip on the rope and stared down at the other three wolves in a shocked and wondering daze. If he had learned anything about these killers, it was to respect their near-human cunning. But they were less than human in their lusts; they would not share or help one another. That was the weakness and the curse of their kind.

The grey dog bristled and sniffed at the still twitching white, then jumped with a savage growl and ripped at its throat. Crimson spurted across the snow, and the grey female leaped in with flashing teeth. The white she-wolf hesitated, and then she too hurled herself into the snarling, snapping fight to gorge on the flesh of her mate.

Nanka Tal shook his head, lost in a brief and, for him, rare moment of reflection. A man could learn much about himself from the study of animals—learn and profit. He climbed down the opposite side of the rocks and ran, limping, towards the hut.

He reached the door and got his rifle from the ledge without interference. When he stepped back to the doorway and brought up the gun, the three wolves were still at the cairn, oblivious of him and everything but the carcass they were tearing apart in great red chunks. Nanka Tal, out of some sense of propriety, dropped the white she-wolf first, then the grey pair, with a total expenditure of five shots. Then he walked on to have a look at them.

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He prodded one of the great muscular bodies with his toe, and drew air deep into his lungs. Here was meat. Not sheep, true, but meat nevertheless, meat enough to feed his people until he found sheep. The bandits would return in the spring, perhaps, but so would the game. A patient man could always find ways to survive, a man with a woman like Rura.

In a little while, as soon as he had eaten, Nanka Tal, the hunter of Rongbar village, would start down to the valley with food, but first he had a duty to perform. Climbing to the summit, he placed the largest rock he could find on top of the shrine.

* * *

HIDDEN HANDS

Try your hand at this ! Each description concerns a hand that is familiar to you—in some cases, you will recognize the hand of an old friend. Count one mark for the author of the work, one for the title, and one for every small query. Full marks for each question are given in brackets after the answer. The total score is 31. The answers are on page 115.

1. *" What a situation—if anybody should come ! ". He was holding her in his arms, with his hands clasping her waist—and she appeared to have fainted.*
   Whose hands ? Whose waist ? Whose description ?
2. *There was a fall and a crash of broken glass after she had spread out her hand and made a snatch in the air.*
   Whose hand ? What caused the crash ?
3. *The frill of black lace which fringed her hand was pushed back to disclose five livid little spots.*
   Whose hand ? Who pushed back the frill of lace ? Who had ill-treated her ?
4. *These seafarers bought a pig and some green Jack-daws, and a lovely Monkey with lollipop paws, and no end of Stilton Cheese.*
   What colour were their hands ?
5. *She said, " I am determined I will." He put out his hands. She fell and was taken up lifeless !*
   Whose hands ? Who was she ? Where did it happen ?
6. *He took them all in his right hand, put five of them into his coat pocket and threatened to eat the sixth, taking out his penknife.*
   Whose hand ? What was he holding ?
7. *The fortune-tellers say that one hand shows what we are born with and the other, what we have made of life. An autobiography takes its title from this saying. Give the title and the author.*
8. *Someone looked towards the sea and saw the appearance of a man's hand.*
   Who was it ? What did the hand portend ?

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★ *" You'd better hurry, sir ! " The author wakes grudgingly as the hospital porter rouses him by pulling off the bed-clothes. In the dark, he sets out on the next phase of his student career, cycling furiously into the swirling snow . . .*

CHASING THE STORK

by RICHARD GORDON

" YOU must check your bags before you go to your mother," Sister said.

We chalked our room numbers on the board in the hall and went out for a drink in the King George. The snow was falling thickly, swirling round the lamp-posts and clinging to the hospital walls, giving the old building a more sinister appearance than ever.

" What a night to start stork-chasing ! " Grimsdyke exclaimed.

" What happens when we get out there ? " I asked.

" Getting nervous, old boy ? "

" I am a bit. I haven't seen a baby born before. I might faint or something."

" There's nothing to worry about," Benskin told me cheerfully. " I was talking to one of the chaps we're relieving. The midwife always gets there first and tells you what to do under her breath. They're a good crowd. They let the patient think you're the doctor, which is good for the morale of both of you."

We went back to the hospital for dinner. Afterwards Benskin asked the duty porter if everything was still quiet.

" Not a thing, sir," he replied. " It's a bad sign, all right. After it's been as quiet as this for a bit they start popping out like rabbits from their warrens."

We sat in Grimsdyke's room and played poker for matches for a couple of hours. It was difficult to concentrate on the game.

Every time the phone bell rang in the distance we jumped up nervously together. Grimsdyke suggested bed at ten, predicting we should be roused as soon as we dropped off to sleep. We cut for who should be on first call : I lost.

It was four when the porter woke me up. He cheerily pulled off the bed-clothes and handed me a slip of paper with an address scribbled on it in pencil.

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"You'd better hurry, sir," he said. "They sounded proper worried over the phone."

I rolled out of bed and dressed with the enthusiasm of a prisoner on his execution morning.

The night outside was as thick and white as a rice pudding. After a glance through the curtains I pulled a green-and-yellow hooped rugby jersey over my shirt and a dirty cricket sweater over that. I tucked the ends of my trousers into football stockings, wrapped a long woollen scarf round my neck, and hid the lot under a duffle coat. I looked as if I was going to take the middle watch on an Arctic fishing vessel.

The reason for this conscientious protection against the weather was the form of transport allotted to the students to reach their cases. It was obviously impossible to provide such inconsequential people with a car and we were nearly all too poor to own one ourselves.

On the other hand, if the students had been forced to walk to their patients the race would have gone to the storks. A compromise had therefore been effected some ten years ago and the young obstetricians had the loan of the midwifery bicycle.

This vehicle had unfortunately not worn well in the service of the obstetrical department. It had originally been equipped with such necessaries as brakes, mudguards, lights, and rubber blocks on the pedals, but, as human beings sadly lose their hair, teeth, and firm subcutaneous fat in the degeneration of age, the machine had similarly been reduced to its bare comfortless bones.

The saddle had the trick of slipping unexpectedly and throwing the rider either backwards or forwards, a gesture which it was impossible to anticipate. The only way to stop the machine was by falling off. It was the most dangerous complication of midwifery in the practice of the hospital.

I searched for the address on the map. It was on the other side of the district, a short, narrow, coy street hiding between a brewery and a goods yard. It seemed as remote as Peru.

I waddled down to the out-patient hall to collect the instrument bags. The place was cold and deserted; the porter, who had called me, was yawning in the corner over the telephone, and the two night nurses were huddled in their cloaks round their tiny electric fire, sewing their way through a stack of gauze dressings.

They took no notice of the globular figure coming down the stairs: an insignificant midwifery clerk wasn't worth dropping a stitch for. To the houseman, or, if they were lucky, one of the registrars come to open an emergency appendix—to them they would give a cup of coffee and a flutter of the eyelids. But what good were the junior students?

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The bicycle was kept in a small shed in the hospital courtyard, and had for its stable-mate the long trolley used for moving unlucky patients to the mortuary. I saw that the first problem of the case was balancing myself and my equipment on the machine. As well as the two leather bags I had a couple of drums the size of biscuit barrels containing the sterilized dressings. There was a piece of thick string attached to the bicycle, which I felt was probably part of its structure, but I removed it and used it to suspend the two drums round my neck like a yoke.

Carefully mounting the machine, I clung to the bags and the handle-bars with both hands and pedalled uncertainly towards the front gate. The snow-flakes fell upon me eagerly, like a crowd of mosquitoes, leaping for my face, the back of my neck, and my ankles.

The few yards across the courtyard were far enough to indicate the back tyre was flat and the direction of the front wheel had no constant relationship to the way the handle-bars were pointing. I crunched to a stop by the closed iron gates and waited for the porter to leave his cosy cabin and let me out.

"You all right, sir?" he asked with anxiety.

"Fine," I said, "I love it like this. It makes me feel like a real doctor."

"Well," he said dubiously, "good luck, sir."

"Thank you."

The porter turned the key in the lock and pulled one of the gates open against the resisting snow.

"Your back light isn't working, sir," he shouted.

I called back I thought it didn't matter and pedalled away into the thick night feeling like Captain Oates. I had done about twenty yards when the chain came off.

After replacing the chain I managed to wobble along the main road leading away from the hospital in the direction of the brewery. The building looked as hostile as polar ice-cliffs. Everything appeared so different from the kindly day-time, which gave life to the cold, dead streets with the brisk circulation of traffic. Fortunately, my thorough knowledge of the local public houses provided a few finger-posts, and I might have done tolerably well as a flying angel of mercy if the front wheel hadn't dropped off.

I fell into the snow in the gutter and wished I had gone in for the law. As I got to my feet I reflected that the piece of string might have had something important to do with the attachment of the front wheel; but now the lesion was inoperable.

Picking up my luggage, I left the machine to be covered by the snow like a dead husky and trudged on. By now I was fighting mad. I told myself I would damn well deliver that baby.

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I turned off the main road towards the brewery, but after a few hundred yards I had to admit I was lost. Even the pubs were unfamiliar. I now offered no resistance to my environment and submissively felt the moisture seeping through my shoes. I leant against a sheltering door-post, preparing to meet death in as gentlemanly a way as possible.

At that moment a police car, forced like myself into the snow, stopped in front of me. The driver swung his light on my load and on myself, and had no alternative but to decide I was a suspicious character. He asked for my identity card.

"Quick!" I said dramatically. "I am going to a woman in childbirth."

"Swithin's?" asked the policeman.

"Yes. It may be too late. I am the doctor."

"Hop in the back!"

There is nothing that delights policemen more than being thrown into a midwifery case. There is a chance they might have to assist in the performance, which means a picture in the evening papers and congratulatory beer in the local. The constable who walked into St. Swithin's one afternoon with an infant born into the lower deck of a trolley bus looked as pleased as if he were the father.

The warm police car took me to the address, and the crew abandoned me with reluctance. It was a tall, dead-looking tenement for ever saturated with the smells of brewing and shunting. I banged on the knocker and waited.

A thin female child of about five opened the door.

"I'm the doctor," I announced.

The arrival of the obstetrician in such a briskly multiplying area caused no more stir than the visit of the milkman.

"Upstairs, mate," she said and scuttled away into the darkness like a rat.

The house breathed the sweet stench of bed-bugs; inside it was dark, wet, and rotting. I fumbled my way to the stairs and creaked upwards. On the second floor a door opened a foot, a face peered through, and, as the shaft of light caught me, the door was slammed shut.

It was on the fifth and top floor that the *accouchement* seemed to be taking place, as noise and light were coming from under one of the doors. I pushed it open and lumbered in.

"Don't worry!" I said. "I have come."

I took a look round the room. It wasn't small, but a lot was going on in it. In the centre, three or four children were fighting on the pock-marked linoleum for possession of their plaything, a piece of boxwood with a nail through it. A fat woman was unconcernedly

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making a cup of tea on a gas-ring in one corner, and in the other a girl of about seventeen with long yellow hair was reading last Sunday's paper. A cat, sympathetic to the excited atmosphere, leapt hysterically among the children.

Behind the door was a bed, beside which was Grandma—who always appears on these occasions, irrespective of the social standing of the participants.

Grandma was giving encouragement tempered with warning to the mother, a thin, pale, fragile woman on the bed, and it was obvious that the affair had advanced alarmingly. A tightly-packed fire roared in the grate and above the mantelpiece Field Marshal Montgomery, of all people, looked at the scene quizzically.

"Her time is near, doctor," said Grandma with satisfaction.

"You have no need to worry any longer, missus," I said brightly.

I dropped the kit on the floor and removed my duffle coat which wept dirty streams on to the lino. The first step was to get elbow-room and clear out the non-playing members of the team.

"Who are you?" I asked the woman making tea.

"From next door," she replied. "I thought she'd like a cup of tea, poor thing."

"I want some hot water," I said sternly. "Lots of hot water. Fill basins with it. Or anything you like. Now you all go off and make me some hot water. Take the children as well. They ought to be in bed."

"They sleep in 'ere, doctor," said Grandma.

"Oh. Well—they can give you a hand. And take the cat with you. Come on—all of you. Lots of water, now."

They left unwillingly, in disappointment. They liked their entertainment to be fundamental.

"Now, mother," I started, when we were alone.

A thought struck me—hard, in the pit of the stomach. The midwife—the cool, practised, confident midwife. Where was she? Tonight—this memorable night to the two of us in the room—what had happened to her? Snow-bound, of course. I felt like an actor who has forgotten his lines and finds the prompter has gone out for a drink.

"Mother," I said earnestly. "How many children have you?"

"Five, doctor," she groaned.

Well, that was something. At least one of us knew a bit about it.

She began a frightening increase in activity.

"I think it's coming, doctor!" she gasped, between pains. I grasped her hand vigorously.

"You'll be right as rain in a minute," I said, as confidently as possible. "Leave it to me."

"I feel sick," she cried miserably.

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"So do I," I said.

I wondered what on earth I was going to do.

There was, however, one stand-by that I had thoughtfully taken the trouble to carry. I turned into the corner farthest away from the mother and tried to look as if I was waiting confidently for the precise time to intervene. Out of my hip pocket I drew a small but valuable volume in a limp red cover—*The Student's Friend in Obstetrical Difficulties.*

It was written by a hard-headed obstetrician on the staff of a Scottish hospital who was under no illusions about what the students would find difficult. It started off with "The Normal Delivery." The text was written with argument, directly, in short numbered paragraphs, like a cookery book. I glanced at the first page.

"Sterility," it said. "The student must try to achieve sterile surroundings for the delivery, and scrub-up himself as for a surgical operation. Newspapers may be used if sterile towels are unobtainable, as they are often bacteria-free."

Newspaper, that was it! There was a pile of papers in the corner, and I scattered the sheets over the floor and the bed. This was a common practice in the district, and if they knew how many babies were born yearly straight on to their daily papers, the editors would be most surprised.

There was a knock on the door, and Grandma passed through an enamel bowl of boiling water.

"Is it come yet, doctor?" she asked.

"Almost," I told her. "I shall need lots more water."

I put the bowl down on the table, took some soap and a brush from the bag, and started scrubbing.

"Oh, doctor, doctor . . . !" cried the mother.

"Don't get alarmed," I said airily.

"It's coming, doctor!"

I scrubbed furiously. The mother groaned. Grandma shouted through the door she had more hot water. I shouted back at her to keep out. The cat, which had not been removed as ordered, jumped in the middle of the newspaper and started tearing at it with its claws.

Suddenly I became aware of a new note in the mother's cries—a higher, wailing, muffled squeal. I dropped the soap and tore back the bed-clothes.

The baby was washed and tucked up in one of the drawers from the wardrobe, which did a turn of duty as a cot about once a year. The mother was delighted and said she had never had such a comfortable delivery.

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The spectators were re-admitted, and cooed over the infant. There were cups of tea all round. I had the best one, with sugar in it. I felt the name of the medical profession never stood higher.

"Do you do a lot of babies, doctor?" asked the mother.

"Hundreds," I said. "Every day."

"What's your name, doctor, if you don't mind?" she said. I told her.

"I'll call 'im after you. I always call them after the doctor or the nurse, according."

I beamed and bowed graciously. I was genuinely proud of the child. It was my first baby, born through my own skill and care. I had already forgotten in the flattering atmosphere that my single manœuvre in effecting the delivery was pulling back the eider-down.

Packing the instruments up, I climbed into my soggy duffle coat and, all smiles, withdrew. At the front door I found to my contentment that the snow had stopped and the roads shone attractively in the lamplight. I began to whistle as I walked away. At that moment the midwife turned the corner on her bicycle.

"Sorry, old chap," she said, as she drew up. "I was snowed under. Have you been in?"

"In! It's all over."

"Did you have any trouble?" she asked dubiously.

"Trouble!" I said with contempt. "Not a bit of it! It went splendidly."

★ ***"It's Christmas!" Next month's escapades, from Richard Gordon's "Doctor in the House", provide the hospital ward with a good deal more entertainment than his fellow students originally intended.***

* * *

LARKING ABOUT!

Jonathan fancied himself as a weather prophet, but he always had an answer if his forecast proved wrong. "D'ye reckon tha's a gooen 'a rain t'day?" his mates asked him one doubtful-looking morning. "Naow, tha' oon't rain t'day;" assured Jonathan, "lark's gorn up."

Later it was coming down in torrents. "Wha' about yar ol' lark now?" chaffed his mates. "Ah," retorted Jonathan, "'e wus a young 'un, 'e din't know no be'er!"

ARTHUR BRIDGES, *in The Countryman*

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TRIUMPH OF AUTUMN

Vast is the triumph which at your behest
Will blaze abroad. The sun himself shall stride
With clanging pomp, bronze east to rubied west,
The moon sway wine-flushed after, ...

EDMUND BLUNDEN, *Shells by a Stream*

There was a most lovely combination at the head of the vale of the yellow autumnal hills wrapped in sunshine, and overhung with partial mists, the green and yellow trees, and the distant snow-topped mountains. It was a most heavenly morning. The Cockermouth traveller came with thread, hardware, mustard, etc. She has travelled over the mountains these thirty years . . .

We walked before tea by Bainriggs to observe the many-coloured foliage. The oaks dark green with yellow leaves, the birches generally still green, some near the water yellowish, the sycamore crimson and crimson-tufted, the mountain ash a deep orange, the common ash lemon-colour. William composing in the evening.

DOROTHY WORDSWORTH, *Journals*, *October*, 1800

Cornucopia

Little cheeses for you that they dry in baskets of rushes,
And plums that ripen in the autumn weather,
And chestnuts, and the cheerful red of apples.
In brief, here's Ceres, Love, and rowdy Bacchus
—And red-stained blackberries, and grapes in bunches.

Copa Surisca, translated by HELEN WADDELL
from a ninth century MS.

Crown of Love

I plucked a few bunches of guelder-rose fruits, transparent, ruby berries. She stroked them softly against her lips and cheek, caressing them. Then she murmured to herself: "I have always wanted to put red berries in my hair."

The shawl she had been wearing was thrown across her shoulders, and her head was bare, and her black hair, soft and short and ecstatic, tumbled wildly into loose light curls. She thrust the stalks of the berries under her combs. Her hair was not heavy or long enough to have held them. Then, with the ruby bunches glowing through the black mist of curls, she looked up at me,

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brightly, with wide eyes. I looked at her, and felt the smile winning into her eyes.. Then I turned and dragged a trail of golden-leaved convolvulus from the hedge, and I twisted it into a coronet for her. "There!" said I, "you're crowned" . . . She stooped down, and the chaplet fell from her hair, and only one bunch of berries remained. The ground around us was strewn with the four-lipped burrs of beechnuts, and the quaint little nut-pyramids were scattered among the ruddy fallen leaves. Emily gathered a few nuts.

"I love beechnuts," she said, "but they make me long for my childhood again till I could almost cry out. To go out for beechnuts before breakfast; to thread them for necklaces before supper. There was as much pleasure in a beech necklace then, as there is in the whole autumn now—and no sadness. There are no more unmixed joys after you have grown up." She kept her face to the ground as she spoke, and she continued to gather fruits . . . I stripped one of its horny brown coat and gave it to her. She opened her mouth slightly to take it, looking up into my eyes.

D. H. LAWRENCE, *The White Peacock*

The Burning of the Leaves

Now is the time for the burning of the leaves.
They go to the fire; the nostril pricks with smoke
Wandering slowly into a weeping mist.
Brittle and blotched, ragged and rotten sheaves!
A flame seizes the smouldering ruin and bites
On stubborn stalks that crackle as they resist.

The last hollyhock's fallen tower is dust;
All the spices of June are a bitter reek,
All the extravagant riches spent and mean.
All burns! The reddest rose is a ghost;
Sparks whirl up, to expire in the mist: the wild
Fingers of fire are making corruption clean . . .

LAURENCE BINYON

In Idleness

8 *Nov.* 1800. Yesterday Mary drove me all in the rain to Basingstoke, and still more all in the rain back again because it rained harder . . . We had a very quiet evening, I believe Mary found it dull, but I thought it very pleasant. To sit in idleness over a good fire in a well-proportioned room is a luxurious sensation. Sometimes we talked & sometimes we were quite silent; I said two or three amusing things, & Mr. Holder made a few infamous puns.

JANE AUSTEN, *in a letter to Cassandra Austen*

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Woodland Brown

On every road I wandered by,
Trod beside me, close and dear,
The beautiful and death-struck year :
Whether in the woodland brown
I heard the beechnut rustle down,
And saw the purple crocus pale
Flower about the autumn dale . . .

A. E. HOUSMAN, *A Shropshire Lad*

November Birthday

My mother had forgotten that the first of November was Miss Plimsoll's birthday, and we only remembered just before luncheon. There was no time to purchase one of those nice hand-bags which Miss Plimsoll was known to like. My mother discovered, however, a large quarto manuscript book bound in white vellum with leather tags. It had been bought in Venice for a Visitors' Book and had never been used. It was presented to Miss Plimsoll, who became ecstatic. " Now," she said, clasping the volume to her flat little bosom, " I really *shall* write a diary."

She loved that book. She crooned over it. And one day she produced from the English shop in the town a paintbrush, a mapping nib, and a bottle of Indian ink. . . . I looked over her shoulder. " But, Miss Plimsoll," I said, when she had got irretrievably to the R, " you don't spell ' diary ' like that." " Oh ! " she exclaimed. " Oh, oh ! " At this I snatched the book from her and danced from the room. I burst into the Chancery, waving it above my head. " Look ! " I shouted, " This is how Miss Plimsoll spells Diary ! " Everybody including the native clerk was thoroughly amused. My triumph became positively orgiac. I danced round the garden shouting " Dairy ! Dairy ! Dairy ! "

HAROLD NICOLSON, *Some People*

Farewell

Now the last rays go down and darkness comes
Travelling across the valleys of the sky,
Over the fields of light where swallows try
Their parting flights across chrysanthemums.
All the bright hours have gone ; the lavender
Raises green lances where the rose lies dead
While rains of Michaelmas now break asunder
Half the crushed yellow of a sunflower's head . . .

JOHN BAYLISS

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CAT'S-PAW

"A problem?" echoed Mr. Crabtree. "I'll do everything I can to help"

by STANLEY ELLIN

THERE was little to choose among any of the rooms in the boarding-house in their dingy, linoleum-floored, brass-bedsteaded uniformity, but the day he answered the advertisement on the *Help Wanted* page, Mr. Crabtree realized that one small advantage accrued to his room: the public telephone in the passage was opposite his door, and simply by keeping an ear cocked he could be at the instrument a moment after the first shrill warning ring had sounded.

In view of this he closed his application for employment not only with his signature, but with the number of the telephone as well. His hand shook a little as he did so; he felt party to a gross deception in implying that the telephone was his personal property, but the prestige to be gained in this way, so he thought, might somehow tip the balance in his favour. To that end he tremulously sacrificed the unblemished principles of a lifetime.

The advertisement itself had been nothing less than a miracle. *Man wanted,* it said, *for hard work at moderate pay. Sober, honest, industrious former clerk, age 45–50 preferred. Write all details. Box 111*; and Mr. Crabtree, peering incredulously through his spectacles, had read it with a shuddering dismay at the thought of all his fellows, aged 45–50, who might be seeking hard work at moderate pay, and who might have read the same notice minutes, or perhaps hours, before.

His answer could have served as a model letter of application for employment. His age was forty-eight, his health excellent. He was unmarried. He had served one single firm for thirty years; had served it faithfully and well; had an admirable record for attendance and punctuality. Unfortunately, the firm had merged with another and larger; regrettably, many capable employees had to be released. Hours? Unimportant. His only interest was in doing a good job no matter the time involved. Salary? A matter entirely in the hands of his prospective employer. His previous salary had been fifty dollars per week, but naturally that had come after years of proved worth. Available for an interview at any time. References from the following. The signature. And then, the telephone number.

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All this had been written and rewritten a dozen times until Mr. Crabtree had been satisfied that every necessary word was there, each word in its proper place. Then, in the copperplate hand that had made his ledgers a thing of beauty, the final draft had been transferred to fine bond paper purchased against this very contingency, and posted.

After that, alone with his speculations on whether a reply would come by mail, by telephone, or not at all, Mr. Crabtree spent two endless and heart-fluttering weeks until the moment when he answered a call and heard his name come over the wire like the crack of doom.

" Yes," he said shrilly, " I'm Crabtree ! I sent a letter ! "

" Calmly, Mr. Crabtree, calmly," said the voice. It was a clear thin voice which seemed to pick up and savour each syllable before delivering it, and it had an instant and chilling effect on Mr. Crabtree who was clutching the telephone as if pity could be squeezed from it.

" I have been considering your application," the voice went on with the same painful deliberation, " and I am most gratified by it. Most gratified. But before calling the matter settled, I should like to make clear the terms of employment I am offering. You would not object to my discussing it now ? "

The word *employment* rang dizzily through Mr. Crabtree's head. " No," he said, " please do."

" Very well. First of all, do you feel capable of operating your own establishment ? "

" My own establishment ? "

" Oh, have no fears about the size of the establishment or the responsibilities involved. It is a matter of some confidential reports which must be drawn up regularly. You would have your own office, your name on the door, and, of course, no supervision directly over you. That should explain the need for an exceptionally reliable man."

" Yes," said Mr. Crabtree, " but those confidential reports . . ."

" Your office will be supplied with a list of several important corporations. It will also receive subscriptions to a number of financial journals which frequently make mention of those same corporations. You will note all such references as they appear, and, at the end of each day, consolidate them into a report which will be mailed to me. I must add that none of this calls for any theoretical work or literary treatment. Accuracy, brevity, clarity : those are the three measures to go by. You understand that, of course ? "

" Yes, indeed," said Mr. Crabtree fervently.

" Excellent," said the voice. " Now, your hours will be from nine to five, five days a week, with an hour off at noon for lunch.

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I must stress this: I am insistent on punctuality and attendance, and I expect you to be as conscientious about these things as if you were under my personal supervision every moment of the day. I hope I do not offend you when I emphasize this?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Mr. Crabtree. "I . . ."

"Let me continue," the voice said. "Here is the address where you will appear one week from today, and the number of your room"—Mr. Crabtree without pencil or paper at hand pressed the numbers frantically into his memory—"and the office will be completely prepared for you. The door will be open, and you will find two keys in a drawer of the desk: one for the door and one for the cabinet in the office. In the desk you will also find the list I mentioned, as well as the materials needed in making out your reports. In the cabinet you will find a stock of periodicals to start work on."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Crabtree, "but those reports . . ."

"They should contain every single item of interest about the corporations on your list, from business transactions to changes in personnel. And they must be mailed to me immediately upon your leaving the office each day. Is that clear?"

"Only one thing," said Mr. Crabtree. "To whom—where do I mail them?"

"A pointless question," said the voice sharply, much to Mr. Crabtree's alarm. "To the box number with which you are already familiar, of course."

"Of course," said Mr. Crabtree.

"Now," said the voice with a gratifying return to its original deliberate tones, "the question of salary. I have given it a good deal of thought, since, as you must realize, there are a number of factors involved. In the end, I let myself be guided by the ancient maxim: a good workman is worthy of his hire—you recall those words?"

"Yes," said Mr. Crabtree.

"And," the voice said, "a poor workman can be easily dispensed with. On that basis, I am prepared to offer you fifty-two dollars a week. Is that satisfactory?"

Mr. Crabtree stared at the telephone dumbly and then recovered his voice. "Very," he gasped. "Oh, very much so. I must confess I never . . ."

The voice brought him up sharply. "But that is conditional, you understand. You will be—to use a rather clumsy term—on probation until you have proved yourself. Either the job is handled to perfection, or there is no job."

Mr. Crabtree felt his knees turn to water at the grim suggestion. "I'll do my best," he said. "I most certainly will do my absolute best."

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"And," the voice went on relentlessly, "I attach great significance to the way you observe the confidential nature of your work. It is not to be discussed with anyone, and since the maintenance of your office and supplies lies entirely in my hands there can be no excuse for a defection. I have also removed temptation in the form of a telephone which you will *not* find on your desk. I hope I do not seem unjust in my abhorrence of the common practice where employees waste their time in idle conversation during working hours."

Since the death of an only sister twenty years before, there was not a soul in the world who would have dreamed of telephoning Mr. Crabtree to make any sort of conversation whatsoever; but he only said, "No, sir. Absolutely not."

"Then you are in agreement with all the terms we have discussed?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Crabtree.

"Any further questions?"

"One thing," said Mr. Crabtree. "My salary. How . . ."

"It will reach you at the end of each week," said the voice, "in cash. Anything else?"

Mr. Crabtree's mind was now a tumult of questions, but he found it impossible to fix on any particular one. Before he could do so, the voice said crisply, "Good luck, then," and there was the click which told him his caller had hung up. It was only when he attempted to do the same that he discovered his hand had been clenched so tightly round the receiver that it cost him momentary anguish to disengage it.

It must be admitted that the first time Mr. Crabtree approached the address given him, it would not have surprised him greatly to find no building there at all. But the building was there, reassuring in its immensity, teeming with occupants who packed the lifts solidly, and, in the corridors, looked through him and scurried around him with efficient disinterest.

The office was there too, hidden away at the end of a devious corridor of its own on the very top floor, a fact called to Mr. Crabtree's attention by a stair across the corridor, which led up to an open door through which the flat grey of the sky could be seen.

The most impressive thing about the office was the CRABTREE'S AFFILIATED REPORTS boldly stencilled on the door. Opening the door, one entered an incredibly small and narrow room made even smaller by the massive dimensions of the furniture that crowded it. To the right, immediately inside the door, was a gigantic filing cabinet. Thrust tightly against it, but still so large that

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it utilized the remainder of the wall space on that side, was a huge, old-fashioned desk with a swivel chair before it.

The window set in the opposite wall was in keeping with the furniture. It was an immense window, broad and high, and its sill came barely above Mr. Crabtree's knees. He felt a momentary qualm when he first glanced through it and saw the sheer dizzying drop below, the terrifying quality of which was heightened by the blind, windowless walls of the building directly across from him.

One look was enough; henceforth, Mr. Crabtree kept the bottom section of the window securely fastened and adjusted only the top section to his convenience.

The keys were in a desk drawer; pen, ink, a box of nibs, blotters, and half a dozen other accessories more impressive than useful were in another drawer; a supply of stamps was at hand; and, most pleasant, there was a plentiful supply of stationery, each piece bearing the letterhead, *Crabtree's Affiliated Reports*, the number of the office, and the address of the building. In his delight at this discovery Mr. Crabtree dashed off a few practice lines with some bold flourishes of the pen, and then, a bit alarmed at his own prodigality, carefully tore the sheet to minute shreds and dropped it into the waste paper basket at his feet.

After that, his efforts were devoted wholly to the business at hand. The filing cabinet disgorged a dismayingly large file of publications which had to be pored over, line by line, and Mr. Crabtree never finished studying a page without the harrowing sensation that he had somehow by-passed the mention of a name which corresponded to one on the typed list he had found, as promised, in the desk. Then he would retrace the entire page with an awful sense of dallying at his work, and groan when he came to the end of it without finding what he had not wanted to find in the first place.

It seemed to him at times that he could never possibly deplete the monstrous pile of periodicals before him. Whenever he sighed with pleasure at having made some headway, he would be struck with the gloomy foreknowledge that the next morning would find a fresh delivery of mail at his door and, consequently, more material to add to the pile.

There were, however, breaks in this depressing routine. One was the preparation of the daily report, a task which, somewhat to Mr. Crabtree's surprise, he found himself learning to enjoy; the other was the prompt arrival each week of the sturdy envelope containing his salary down to the last dollar bill, although this was never quite the occasion for unalloyed pleasure it might have been.

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Mr. Crabtree would carefully slit open one end of the envelope, remove the money, count it, and place it neatly in his ancient wallet. Then he would poke trembling exploratory fingers into the envelope, driven by the fearful recollection of his past experience to look for the notice that would tell him his services were no longer required. That was always a bad moment, and it had the unfailing effect of leaving him ill and shaken until he could bury himself in his work again.

The work was soon part of him. He had ceased bothering with the typed list; every name on it was firmly imprinted in his mind, and there were restless nights when he could send himself off to sleep merely by repeating the list a few times. One name in particular had come to intrigue him, merited special attention. *Efficiency Instruments, Ltd.* was unquestionably facing stormy weather. There had been drastic changes in personnel, talks of a merger, sharp fluctuations on the market.

It rather pleased Mr. Crabtree to discover that with the passage of weeks into months each of the names on his list had taken on a vivid personality for him. *Amalgamated* was steady as a rock, stolid in its comfortable success; *Universal* was high-pitched, fidgety in its exploration of new techniques; and so on down the line. But *Efficiency Instruments, Ltd.* was Mr. Crabtree's pet project, and he had, more than once, nervously caught himself giving it perhaps a shade more attention than it warranted. He brought himself up sharply at such times; impartiality must be maintained, otherwise . . .

It came without any warning at all. He returned from lunch, punctual as ever, opened the door of the office, and knew he was standing face to face with his employer.

"Come in, Mr. Crabtree," said the clear, thin voice, "and shut the door."

Mr. Crabtree closed the door and stood speechless.

"I must be a prepossessing figure," said the visitor with a certain relish, "to have such a potent effect on you. You know who I am, of course?"

To Mr. Crabtree's numbed mind the large, bulbous eyes fixed unwinkingly on him, the wide, flexible mouth, the body, short and round as a barrel, bore a horrifying resemblance to a frog sitting comfortably at the edge of a pond, with himself in the unhappy role of a fly hovering close by.

"I believe," said Mr. Crabtree shakily, "that you are my employer, Mr. . . . Mr. . . ."

A stout forefinger nudged Mr. Crabtree's ribs playfully. "As long as the bills are paid, the name is unimportant, eh, Mr. Crabtree?

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However, for the sake of expedience, let me be known to you as—say—George Spelvin. Have you ever encountered the ubiquitous Mr. Spelvin in your journeyings, Mr. Crabtree ? "

" I'm afraid not," said Mr. Crabtree miserably.

" Then you are not a playgoer, and that is all to the good. And if I may hazard a guess, you are not one to indulge yourself in literature or the cinema either ? "

" I do try to keep up with the daily newspaper," said Mr. Crabtree stoutly. " There's a good deal to read in it, you know, Mr. Spelvin, and it's not always easy, considering my work here, to find time for other diversions. That is, if a man wants to keep up with the newspapers."

The corners of the wide mouth lifted in what Mr. Crabtree hoped was a smile. " That is precisely what I hoped to hear you say. Facts, Mr. Crabtree, facts ! I wanted a man with a single-minded interest in facts, and your words now as well as your application to your work tell me I have found him in you. I am very gratified, Mr. Crabtree."

Mr. Crabtree found that the blood was thumping pleasantly through his veins. " Thank you. Thank you again, Mr. Spelvin. I know I've been trying very hard, but I didn't know whether . . . Won't you sit down ? " Mr. Crabtree tried to get his arm round the barrel before him in order to swing the chair into position, and failed. " The office is a bit small. But very comfortable," he stammered hastily.

" I am sure it is suitable," said Mr. Spelvin. He stepped back until he was almost fixed against the window and indicated the chair. " Now I should like you to be seated, Mr. Crabtree, while I discuss the matter I came on."

Under the spell of that commanding hand Mr. Crabtree sank into the chair and pivoted it until he faced the window and the squat figure outlined against it. " If there is any question about today's report," he said, " I am afraid it isn't complete yet. There were some notes on *Efficiency Instruments* . . ."

Mr. Spelvin waved the matter aside indifferently. " I am not here to discuss that," he said slowly. " I am here to find the answer to a problem which confronts me. And I rely on you, Mr. Crabtree, to help me find that answer."

" A problem ? " Mr. Crabtree found himself warm with a sense of well-being. " I'll do everything I can to help, Mr. Spelvin. Everything I possibly can."

The bulging eyes probed his worriedly. " Then tell me this, Mr. Crabtree : how would you go about killing a man ? "

" I ? " said Mr. Crabtree. " How would I go . . . I'm afraid I don't understand, Mr. Spelvin."

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" I said," Mr. Spelvin repeated, carefully stressing each word, " how would you go about killing a man ? "

Mr. Crabtree's jaw dropped. " But I couldn't. I wouldn't. That," he said, " that would be murder ! "

" Exactly," said Mr. Spelvin.

" But you're joking," said Mr. Crabtree, and tried to laugh, without managing to get more than a thin, breathless wheeze through his constricted throat. Even that pitiful effort was cut short by the sight of the stony face before him. " I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Spelvin, terribly sorry. You can see it's not the customary . . . it's not the kind of thing . . ."

" Mr. Crabtree. In the financial journals you study so assiduously you will find my name—my own name—repeated endlessly. I have a finger in many pies, Mr. Crabtree, and it always prods the plum. To use the more blatant adjectives, I am wealthy and powerful far beyond your wildest dreams—granting that you are capable of wild dreams—and a man does not attain that position by idling his time away on pointless jokes, or in passing the time of day with hirelings. My time is limited, Mr. Crabtree. If you cannot answer my question, say so, and let it go at that ! "

" I don't believe I can," said Mr. Crabtree piteously.

" You should have said that at once," Mr. Spelvin replied, " and spared me my moment of choler. Frankly, I did not believe you could answer my question, and if you had, it would have been a most disillusioning experience.

" You see, Mr. Crabtree, I envy, I deeply envy, your serenity of existence where such questions never even enter. Unfortunately, I am not in that position. At one point in my career, I made a mistake, the only mistake that has ever marked my rise to fortune. This, in time, came to the attention of a man who combines ruthlessness and cleverness to a dangerous degree, and I have been in the power of that man since. He is, in fact, a blackmailer, a common blackmailer who has come to set too high a price on his wares, and so, must now pay for them himself."

" You intend," said Mr. Crabtree hoarsely, " to kill him ? "

Mr. Spelvin threw out a plump hand in protest. " If a fly rested in the palm of that hand," he said sharply, " I could not find the power to close my fingers and crush the life from it. To be blunt, Mr. Crabtree, I am totally incapable of committing an act of violence, and while that may be an admirable quality in many ways, it is merely an embarrassment now, since the man must certainly be killed." Mr. Spelvin paused. " Nor is this a task for a paid assassin. If I resorted to one, I would most assuredly be exchanging one blackmailer for another, and that is altogether impractical." Mr. Spelvin paused again. " So, Mr. Crabtree, you can see there is only

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one conclusion to be drawn: the responsibility for destroying my tormentor rests entirely on you."

"Me!" cried Mr. Crabtree. "Why, I could never—no, never!"

"Oh, come," said Mr. Spelvin brusquely. "You are working yourself into a dangerous state. Before you carry it any further, Mr. Crabtree, I should like to make clear that your failure to carry out my request means that when you leave this office today, you leave it permanently. I cannot tolerate an employee who does not understand his position."

"Not tolerate!" said Mr. Crabtree. "But that is not right, that is not right at all, Mr. Spelvin. I've been working hard." His spectacles blurred. He fumbled with them, cleaned them carefully, replaced them on his nose. "And to leave me with such a secret. I don't see it; I don't see it at all. Why," he said in alarm, "it's a matter for the police!"

To his horror Mr. Spelvin's face turned alarmingly red, and the huge body started to shake in a convulsion of mirth that rang deafeningly through the room.

"Forgive me," he managed to gasp at last. "Forgive me, my dear fellow. I was merely visualizing the scene in which you go to the authorities and tell them of the incredible demands put upon you by your employer."

"You must understand," said Mr. Crabtree; "I am not threatening you, Mr. Spelvin. It is only . . ."

"Threatening me? Mr. Crabtree, tell me, what connection do you think there is between us in the eyes of the world?"

"Connection? I work for you, Mr. Spelvin. I'm an employee here. I . . ."

Mr. Spelvin smiled blandly. "What a curious delusion," he said, "when one can see that you are merely a shabby little man engaged in some pitiful little enterprise that could not possibly be of interest to me."

"But you employed me yourself, Mr. Spelvin! I wrote a letter of application!"

"You did," said Mr. Spelvin, "but unfortunately the position was already filled, as I informed you in my very polite letter of explanation. You look incredulous, Mr. Crabtree, so let me inform you that your letter and a copy of my reply rest securely in my files should the matter ever be called in question."

"But this office! These furnishings! My subscriptions!"

"Mr. Crabtree, Mr. Crabtree," said Mr. Spelvin shaking his head heavily, "did *you* ever question the source of your weekly income? The manager of this building, the dealers in supplies, the publishers who deliver their journals to you were no more interested

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in my identity than you were. It is, I grant, a bit irregular for me to deal exclusively in currency sent through the mails in your name, but have no fears for me, Mr. Crabtree. Prompt payments are the opiate of the businessman."

"But my reports!" said Mr. Crabtree who was seriously starting to doubt his own existence.

"To be sure, the reports. I daresay that the ingenious Mr. Crabtree, after receiving my unfavourable reply to his application, decided to go into business for himself. He thereupon instituted a service of financial reports and even attempted to make *me* one of his clients! I rebuffed him sharply I can tell you (I have his first report *and* a copy of my reply to it) but he foolishly persists in his efforts. Foolishly, I say, because his reports are absolutely useless to me; I have no interest in any of the corporations he discusses, and why he should imagine I would have is beyond my reckoning.

"Frankly, I suspect the man is an eccentric of the worst type, but since I have had dealings with many of that type I merely disregard him, and destroy his daily reports on their arrival."

"Destroy them?" said Mr. Crabtree stupefied.

"You have no cause for complaint, I hope," said Mr. Spelvin with some annoyance. "To find a man of your character, Mr. Crabtree, it was necessary for me to specify *hard work* in my advertisement. I am only living up to my part of the bargain in providing it, and I fail to see where the final disposition of it is any of your concern."

"A man of my character," echoed Mr. Crabtree helplessly, "to commit murder?"

"And why not?" The wide mouth tightened ominously. "Let me enlighten you, Mr. Crabtree. I have spent a pleasant and profitable share of my life in observing the human species, as a scientist might study insects under glass. And I have come to one conclusion, Mr. Crabtree, one above all others which has contributed to the making of my own success. I have come to the conclusion that to the majority of our species it is the function that is important, not the motives, nor the consequences.

"My advertisement, Mr. Crabtree, was calculated to enlist the services of one like that; a perfect representative of the type, in fact. From the moment you answered that advertisement to the present, you have been living up to all my expectations: you have been functioning flawlessly with no thought of either motive or consequence.

"Now murder has been made part of your function. I have honoured you with an explanation of its motives; the consequences are clearly defined. Either you continue to function as you always have, or, to put it in a nutshell, you are out of a job."

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" A job ! " said Mr. Crabtree wildly. " What does a job matter to a man in prison ! Or to a man being hanged ! "

" Oh, come," remarked Mr. Spelvin placidly. " Do you think I'd lead you into a trap which might snare me as well ? I am afraid you are being obtuse, my dear man. If you are not, you must realize that my own security is tied in the same package as yours. And nothing less than your permanent presence in this office and your steadfast application to your work is the guarantee of that security."

" That may be easy to say when you're hiding under an assumed name," said Mr. Crabtree hollowly.

" I assure you, Mr. Crabtree, my position in the world is such that my identity can be unearthed with small effort. But I must also remind you that should you carry out my request you will then be a criminal and, consequently, very discreet.

" On the other hand, if you do not carry out my request—and you have complete freedom of choice in that—any charges you may bring against me will be dangerous only to you. The world, Mr. Crabtree, knows nothing about our relationship, and nothing about my affair with the gentleman who has been victimizing me and must now become my victim. Neither his demise nor your charges could ever touch me, Mr. Crabtree.

" Discovering my identity, as I said, would not be difficult. But using that information, Mr. Crabtree, can only lead you to a prison or an institution for the deranged."

Mr. Crabtree felt the last dregs of his strength seeping from him. " You have thought of everything," he said.

" Everything, Mr. Crabtree. When you entered my scheme of things, it was only to put my plan into operation ; but long before that I was hard at work weighing, measuring, evaluating every step of that plan. For example, this room, this very room, has been chosen only after a long and weary search as perfect for my purpose. Its furnishings have been selected and arranged to further that purpose. How ? Let me explain that.

" When you are seated at your desk, a visitor is confined to the space I now occupy at the window. The visitor is, of course, the gentleman in question. He will enter and stand here with the window *entirely open* behind him. He will ask you for an envelope a friend has left. This envelope," said Mr. Spelvin tossing one to the desk.

" You will have the envelope in your desk, will find it, and hand it to him. Then, since he is a very methodical man (I have learned that well), he will place the envelope in the inside pocket of his jacket—and at that moment one good thrust will send him out the window. The entire operation should take less than a minute.

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" Immediately after that," Mr. Spelvin said calmly, " you will close the window to the bottom and return to your work."

" Someone," whispered Mr. Crabtree, " the police . . ."

" Will find," said Mr. Spelvin, " the body of some poor unfortunate who climbed the stairs across the passage and hurled himself from the roof above. And they will know this because inside that envelope secured in his pocket is not what the gentleman in question expects to find there, but a neatly typewritten note explaining the sad affair and its motives, an apology for any inconvenience caused (suicides are great ones for apologies, Mr. Crabtree) and a most pathetic plea for a quick and peaceful burial. And," said Mr. Spelvin, gently touching his fingertips together, " I do not doubt he will get it."

" What," Mr. Crabtree said, " what if something went wrong ? If the man opened the letter when it was given to him. Or . . . if something like that happened ? "

Mr. Spelvin shrugged. " In that case the gentleman in question would merely make his way off quietly and approach me directly about the matter. Realize, Mr. Crabtree, that anyone in my friend's line of work expects occasional little attempts like this, and, while he may not be inclined to think them amusing, he would hardly venture into some precipitate action that might kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. No, Mr. Crabtree, if such a possibility as you suggest comes to pass, it means only that I must reset my trap, and even more ingeniously."

Mr. Spelvin drew a heavy watch from his pocket, studied it, then replaced it carefully. " My time is growing short, Mr. Crabtree. It is not that I find your company wearing, but my man will be making his appearance shortly, and matters must be entirely in your hands at that time. All I require of you is this : when he arrives, the window will be open." Mr. Spelvin thrust it up hard and stood for a moment looking appreciatively at the drop below. " The envelope will be in your desk." He opened the drawer and dropped it in, then closed the drawer firmly. " And at the moment of decision, you are free to act one way or the other."

" Free ? " said Mr. Crabtree, " You said he would ask for the envelope ! "

" He will. He will, indeed. But if you indicate that you know nothing about it, he will quietly make his departure, and later communicate with me. And that will be, in effect, a notice of your resignation from my employ."

Mr. Spelvin went to the door and rested one hand on the knob. " However," he said, " if I do *not* hear from him, that will assure me that you have successfully completed your term of probation and are to be henceforth regarded as a capable and faithful employee."

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" But the reports ! " said Mr. Crabtree. " You destroy them . . ."

" Of course," said Mr. Spelvin, a little surprised. " But you will continue with your work and send the reports to me as you have always done. I assure you, it does not matter to me that they are meaningless, Mr. Crabtree. They are part of a pattern, and your adherence to that pattern is the best assurance of my own security."

The door opened, closed quietly, and Mr. Crabtree found himself alone in the room . . .

The shadow of the building opposite lay heavily on his desk. Mr. Crabtree looked at his watch, found himself unable to read it in the growing dimness of the room, and stood up to pull the cord of the light over his head. At that moment a peremptory knock sounded on the door.

" Come in," said Mr. Crabtree.

The door opened on two figures. One was a small, dapper man, the other a bulky police officer who loomed imposingly over his companion. The small man stepped into the office, and with the gesture of a magician pulling a rabbit from a hat, withdrew a large wallet from his pocket, snapped it open to show the gleam of a badge, closed it, and slid it back into his pocket.

" Police," said the man succinctly. " Name's Sharpe."

Mr. Crabtree nodded politely. " Yes ? " he said.

" Hope you don't mind," said Sharpe briskly. " Just a few questions."

As if this were a cue, the large policeman came up with an efficient-looking notebook and the stub of a pencil, and stood there poised for action. Mr. Crabtree peered over his spectacles at the notebook, and through them at the diminutive Sharpe.

" You're Crabtree ? " said Sharpe, and Mr. Crabtree started, then remembered the name on the door.

" Yes," he said.

Sharpe's cold eyes flickered over him and then took in the room with a contemptuous glance. " This your office ? "

" Yes," said Mr. Crabtree.

" You in it all afternoon ? "

" Since one o'clock," said Mr. Crabtree. " I go to lunch at twelve and return at one promptly."

" I'll bet," said Sharpe, then nodded over his shoulder. " That door open any time this afternoon ? "

" It's always closed while I am working," said Mr. Crabtree.

" Then you wouldn't be able to see anybody going up that stair across the passage there."

" No," replied Mr. Crabtree, " I wouldn't."

Sharpe looked at the desk, then ran a reflective thumb along his

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jaw. "I guess you wouldn't be in a position to see anything happening outside the window either."

"No, indeed," said Mr. Crabtree. "Not while I'm at work."

"Now," said Sharpe, "did you *hear* something outside that window this afternoon? Something out of the ordinary, I mean."

"Out of the ordinary?" repeated Mr. Crabtree vaguely.

"A yell. Somebody yelling. Anything like that?"

Mr. Crabtree puckered his brow. "Why, yes," he said, "yes, I did. And not long ago either. It sounded as if someone had been startled—or frightened. Quite loud, too."

Sharpe nodded to the policeman who closed his notebook slowly. "That ties it up," said Sharpe. "The guy made the jump, and the second he did it he changed his mind, so he came down hollering all the way. Well," he said, turning to Mr. Crabtree in a burst of confidence, "I guess you've got a right to know what's going on here. About an hour ago some character jumped off that roof right over your head. Clear case of suicide, note in his pocket and everything, but we like to get all the facts we can."

"Do you know," said Mr. Crabtree, "who he was?"

Sharpe shrugged. "Another guy with too many troubles. Young, good-looking, pretty snappy dresser. Only thing beats me is why a guy who could afford to dress like that would figure he has more troubles than he can handle."

The policeman in uniform spoke for the first time. "That letter he left," he said deferentially, "sounds like he was a little crazy."

"You have to be a little crazy to take that way out," said Sharpe.

"You're a long time dead," said the policeman heavily.

Sharpe held the doorknob momentarily. "Sorry to bother you," he said to Mr. Crabtree, "but you know how it is. Anyhow, you're lucky in a way. Couple of girls downstairs saw him go by and passed right out." He winked as he closed the door behind him.

Mr. Crabtree stood looking at the closed door until the sound of heavy footsteps passed out of hearing. Then he seated himself in the chair and pulled himself closer to the desk. Some magazines lay there in mild disarray, and he arranged them in a neat pile, stacking them so that all corners met precisely.

Mr. Crabtree picked up his pen, dipped it into the ink-bottle, and steadied the paper before him with his other hand.

"*Efficiency Instruments, Ltd.*," he wrote carefully, "shows increased activity . . ."

* * *

Art is the athletics of the emotions.

HAVELOCK ELLIS

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THE UGLY MAIDEN

Gaiwanda knew that she was not like the other girls of the village

by LARRY FINN

"WHY am I so ugly?" Gaiwanda asked the Manyika girl, whose crinkly hair she was plaiting in the shade of a thatched hut.

"It is very sad," the Manyika girl replied, without answering the question. "Truly, it is sad."

"They say I will never marry," Gaiwanda continued, while her deft fingers played nimbly over the cone-shaped head, "and that my unknown mother is to blame. But is it just that I should suffer for the deeds of my mother? I do not think so. And yet, the young men of the village will not look at me because I am ugly."

The Manyika girl clicked her tongue in sympathy, for she herself was to be married the very next day—to an old man who already had four wives, it was true, but it was marriage according to custom and tradition. And all that Gaiwanda could look forward to was a life of drudgery and loneliness.

"It is finished," Gaiwanda said at last, and the Manyika girl stood up and stretched her almost naked body to its full height.

Gaiwanda studied her with envy, mindful of her own deficiencies, and yet not realizing that it was all a matter of taste. For the Manyika girl was simply a mountain of fat, with breasts and buttocks that could be likened to boulders strewn about; and all of this was topped by a face so scarred by ceremonial knives that the flashing teeth were the only sign of its animation.

She is beautiful, Gaiwanda thought in envy.

Gaiwanda was an orphan, the daughter of a wandering Xhosa woman who had stumbled into the village many years before and had died giving birth to her. Gaiwanda had been reluctantly reared by a headman of the tribe until she was sixteen, and then, after her morose guardian was killed in a cattle raid, she had been left to fend for herself.

The Manyikas treated the Xhosa maiden with careless kindness; she did menial work for which she was paid in chickens and grain; and she was completely ignored by the eligible young bachelors.

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And the poor girl could never understand why she had been made differently from other women.

Gaiwanda had realized from an early age that she was not like the other girls of the village, and she had attempted some of the beautification which was the custom of the tribe, but she had not fared well. She found it impossible to stand the pain of having her teeth filed, and she bore even less well the small knives which were used to make the ornate cicatrices on face and breast that were admired by all men. So Gaiwanda was simply a beast of burden, handicapped by the fact that she was of another tribe, an orphan without dowry, and remarkably ugly.

But all this changed when, one day, a young Manyika named Umtasa returned to the village after an absence of three years. It was not generally known exactly what Umtasa had been doing during his years of voluntary exile, but some of the older men soon found much to discuss with him regarding the land in the south; the land of the *Warungu*—the white man. And when Umtasa was not talking to the old men, he spent the rest of his time paying attention to Gaiwanda.

The first day after his return, Umtasa had greeted Gaiwanda in a tone of respect, which amazed the orphan girl.

"I have come from the land of the *Warungu*," Umtasa had said, "and I have learned much of their ways."

The following day he had come and taken Gaiwanda by the hand and walked with her through the mealie fields, telling her what was in his heart. And thereafter he came every day.

When Umtasa's father, Luakana, an irascible old councillor who suffered from gout, heard about the association, he was barely restrained from disowning his son. And attributing Umtasa's madness to witchcraft, he immediately went to see the village sorcerer and had him concoct some devils' brew that was guaranteed to cure his son permanently of love. It might have been a good remedy, but Umtasa never swallowed it. Nor did he listen to his father's threats. Instead, he merely paid the village chief the price of thirty head of cattle, and installed Gaiwanda in his hut.

It was the talk of the village, this marriage of Umtasa and Gaiwanda. No one could understand why Umtasa, who had the choice of any girl, should have taken to wife the strangely afflicted Gaiwanda. But there were further shocks to come.

Umtasa was actually seen to treat his wife with respect, and, instead of sending her to work in the fields like other wives, he permitted her to keep house while he took care of his few acres himself. The villagers spoke in stunned whispers, the chief scratched his hoary head in wonder, and Umtasa's father paid

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another visit to the sorcerer. But, contrary to general expectation, Umtasa was neither struck by lightning nor afflicted with smallpox. He continued to enjoy a life of marital bliss.

In time, the villagers took the marriage for granted and accepted the couple as part of the community. Only Umtasa's father continued in his attempts to wreck the marriage.

Every year, the Manyika village was visited by a white police trooper, an awe-inspiring individual whose appearance still sent the women and children scurrying to their huts in fear. He came simply to collect the hut taxes, but he always tried to make himself useful during his short stay in the village. And it was to him that Umtasa's father unburdened his troubles and looked for help.

"I see you, lord," the old man said, when the trooper arrived and held the usual council.

"I see you, Luakana," the trooper replied, wondering what the old fool was up to now.

"I have a son, lord," the old man began, "who has brought shame on my house by marrying a slave girl who is also frightfully ugly." (Even uglier than thou, lord, the old man thought.) "He could have taken the cream of our womanhood but instead he has chosen to defile his hut with a demon-begotten girl of another race. I must get rid of her, lord. *Wenazi*—isn't that so?"

"A-a-ah!" the trooper murmured non-committally. Although he was accustomed to strange requests, he saw no reason to become involved in the case of a Manyika who happened to have married a hag. They were all hags, he thought. On the other hand, he had to show some interest for two important reasons: to save his own dignity and to squash any idea the old man might have of using poison.

"I will talk to your son and his wife," the trooper said. "And I will see the girl first," he added. It had suddenly occurred to him that she might be suffering from some disease.

"I will send for her, lord," the old man said.

There were few high lights in a trooper's life, but the white man considered his meeting with Gaiwanda to be one.

She came, dressed simply in a loin-cloth, and stood shyly before the first *Warungu* she had ever seen at close range. And the trooper was absolutely astounded. *Magtig!* Her mother may have been a Xhosa, but her father must have been someone very like himself!

His eyes travelled slowly over her pale-cream body, lingering momentarily on the sweet mouth, the fine, short nose and the small, firm breasts. *Magtig*, she was beautiful!

Gaiwanda shivered slightly. She was afraid of him, and not a little repulsed by his bigness, by the coarse hair on what showed

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of his chest—and by that face! Poor Gaiwanda, who had never seen a white man, nor a mirror.

"Gaiwanda," the trooper said hesitantly and came closer to her, "I am your friend, I want—"

But the girl stepped back hurriedly, afraid that he was going to touch her, which he was.

"Come here, woman," he said sternly, but Gaiwanda fled in terror, and the trooper walked back to the guest hut, feeling like a fool.

"Well, lord," Umtasa's father said to him, "I await your paternal advice."

"My advice, old one," the trooper said peevishly, as he saddled his horse, "is to take the girl away from your son and marry her yourself. Otherwise, leave her alone."

"But she is a slave girl and ugly," the old man insisted.

And the trooper, thinking of his own stolid *huisvrouw* at home, slaving to bring up six children, replied, "*Ja, ja.* But so is my wife."

"*Yowe!*" the old man exclaimed in astonishment, and went off to give his blessing to the young couple.

For, he reasoned in his simple Bantu way, what was good enough for the *Warungu* was good enough for him!

* * *

PORTRAIT IN A GARDEN

He potters in the potting-shed
Where seedlings stand in rows,
And from a nail above his head
Pale bass cascading flows;
A stubborn man, who won't be fed
On what his master knows.

His wooden, grizzled cranium
Has never taken in
That, bedded with Geranium,
Lobelia must sin,
Whilst coroneted Dahlias
God counts among his failures.

Yet do not cross or flout him;
You cannot do without him,
Since from his spatulate green thumb
The glories of your gardens come.

L. E. JONES, *A La Carte*

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OUTSIDE CHANCE

"A boyo" was my Uncle Rogerson—he knew a thing or two about point-to-pointing

by JOHN WELCOME

"SO you are going to ride your first point-to-point over banks tomorrow," said my Uncle Rogerson, holding his port up to the light from a Waterford chandelier and regarding its ruby richness with a warm and appreciative eye.

My Uncle Rogerson is ninety years old, but his cheeks are still as smooth as a baby's and the years have not dimmed the sparkle in his eye. He has a mane of snowy white hair and a carefully tended white moustache. In his youth he had seen some service with a cavalry regiment—round about the time of Majuba Hill I fancy, although the more disrespectful of my young cousins referred to him as being the last survivor of the Light Brigade—and he still preserved unimpaired in his walk the old-time cavalry swagger.

It was, however, that look in his eye which explained to me why I had heard him variously described as "a bit of a lad," "a boyo," "a holy terror" and other warmer if less endearing expressions. Altogether he was a swashbuckling old rogue and I liked him immensely.

Corbellin Hall, his home in Ireland, was kept up in considerable state. The lawns were mown, the stables were freshly painted and the gardens clean and trim and weeded, all of which is rare enough even in the new prosperity which has come to Irish country houses with the influx of the Free English and their money. One lived in comfort when one went to stay there, for there was a flock of servants ruled over by an elderly butler called Jeames who was nearly as old as my uncle and had been in the house since the Dark Ages.

There had, I remembered as I sipped my port, been very little money with the place when my uncle had come into it, and there was some disreputable story, the details of which the family had never been able to discover, about how he had succeeded in finding enough money to put himself on his feet. He certainly had found it, however, for he had later set up the Corbellin Stud and prospered exceedingly.

He was still an enthusiastic supporter of the local hunt and turned out regularly on an elderly cob, to the considerable worry of

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the Master and Secretary who daily expected to have his corpse on their hands. He was well aware of this and it gave him an impish delight to chirrup as he went home at the end of a day: "Still here, Master, still here. I'll see some of ye young fellows out yet!"

Even he, however, had to admit that it was no longer feasible for him to ride his own point-to-pointers. As he liked to have a good horse or two running when the racing came round he had to look about for someone to ride them for him.

The previous year I had won my regimental race and a couple of goodish nomination races on a horse he had bought for me in Ireland, and I needn't mention how thrilled I was when I received a wire telling me that he had a horse for me to ride in the County Corway point-to-point if I could get away. My Colonel had been sympathetic and that is how I came to be sitting at the old man's dinner table that spring evening.

The port decanter was enormous and I judged from the look in my uncle's eye that he had no intention of allowing me to rise from the table until it was finished. It did not seem to me to be the best preparation for riding a race the next day, but there was very little I could do about it.

"These modern point-to-points," said my uncle, refilling his glass and giving the decanter a push along the mahogany towards me, "they are only mock racecourses. All made up fences an' flags and flat racin' rails at the finish, and if you put more than one turn in 'em some jumpin' jackanapes of a steeplechasin' fellah comes down and says the course is dangerous and he can't risk his valuable horses on it.

"Then the committee gets up in horror because if Captain Smellfer-Snooks and his valuable circus of travelling steeplechasers don't come the cars won't come, and if the cars don't come the hunt funds will go down. So they kick out the poor fellow who has designed the course and they straighten it out and they knock two feet off the fences and Captain Smellfer-Snooks comes down and gallops the legs off everyone with his broken-down, bandaged and propped-up steeplechasers and wins all the races and everyone goes home happy!"

My uncle may have been ninety but he knew a thing or two about modern point-to-pointing.

"Go away, Jeames," my uncle said then, turning in his chair and scowling at the elderly butler who was hovering deprecatingly in the shadows. "Mr. Welcome and myself may be some little time. Besides, I want to tell him a story." The butler faded into the shadows. A door closed.

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"Help yourself to some port, me boy," my uncle said, snapping the end off a cigar. "And have a cigar, a small cigar! In the old days," he went on, "a point-to-point was a genuine race between hunters. When I was young all we did in the way of makin' up a fence was to cut the growth off the top of it and stick a flag in it. There was no nonsense then about whether the ditches were to you or away from you. We took 'em as they came. What is more we rode our own hunters, not badly schooled racehorses who'd never seen hounds. We pushed 'em around as fast as they would go to find out which of them and which of us was the best.

"In those days there were two country boys, by name of McGrath, brothers they were, who were great chaps to ride races. One of them was called Slippery Fippence and the other Jerry Jack Tom to distinguish him from his father Jerry Jack. Did you ever hear of them?"

I said I had not and I settled myself into my chair. We were evidently in for a sitting.

"Well," said my uncle with a reminiscent chuckle, "I'll tell you about them.

"They said of Slippery Fippence—and don't ask me why he was called Slippery Fippence because I don't know—that he was so crooked he could hide behind a corkscrew, and they said of Jerry Jack Tom that he couldn't go straight if he was shot out of a gun. So you see the sort they were. But ride? By the Lord Harry they could ride! There was very little between them in ability and it was said of each of them that he could bring home a donkey in front of the best.

"Sometimes the brothers would be the greatest friends; sometimes they would be at each other's throats. You never knew whether they were conniving together or against each other. A little matter of slipping the lead to a friend in the country who would be ready to return it as they came in didn't bother them at all, neither did the conspiring together to ride an unfortunate third party into a tree or a quarry or whatever happened to be handy round the course.

"Of course this was long before we became civilized and had I.N.H.S. representatives at our meetings to lay down the law and tell us to be good little boys. The two brothers were dangerous enemies whom no one liked very much to cross, so by and large they had things pretty well their own way. But the fact that no one ever knew exactly how matters stood between them made it very difficult to bet.

"It made it difficult to ride against them, too, for you never knew whether they had the race fixed between themselves or

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whether they were trying to ride each other into the ground. The state of relations between them was a secret they kept to themselves, until one year, to the astonishment of everybody, they fell out and fell out openly.

"It seemed that the two of them had arranged for Slippery Fippence to win a certain race, but Slippery Fippence, unknown to his brother, had been getting on more and more intimate terms with a local bookie called Gentleman Jimmy Malone.

"He was called Gentleman Jimmy because he was very suave and cultivated and always wore a bowler-topper—that was a very smart hat in those days, you wouldn't remember it—and a grey covert coat, and had a most distinguished line of conversation. He had bought the bowler-topper and the covert coat at an auction of Lord Forth and Bargy's estate and effects, an auction brought about mainly by his own machinations. The devil himself knows where he got the line of conversation from, but that is by the way.

"Gentleman Jimmy had been, it appeared, for some time perturbed about the difficulty of making a book when he didn't know what the brothers were going to do. So he took to spoiling Slippery Fippence with little presents and to standing him half whiskies whenever they chanced to meet which was much more often than usual although poor Slippery Fippence didn't realize this.

"At length, late one night in the smoky back room of Cassidy's public house, Slippery Fippence confided to Gentleman Jimmy that the next race they rode in the two of them had fixed it that he was going to win.

"It didn't take long for Gentleman Jimmy to see that if he could get Slippery Fippence to double-cross his brother the result would be exceedingly profitable for himself. He put this to Slippery Fippence; he put it strongly and backed up his arguments with certain cash promises so that it was not long before Slippery Fippence—about whom it was not said for nothing that he could hide behind a corkscrew—agreed to do as he wished.

"The brothers were artists in their own way. Even though they had a race fixed they liked to give the public the appearance at any rate of a run for their money. On this particular occasion the two of them were indulging in what looked like a whirlwind finish with Jerry Jack Tom just about half a length behind.

"Jerry Jack Tom, needless to say, had every intention of staying there when, three lengths from the finish, Slippery Fippence suddenly stopped riding, his horse stopped too, and Jerry Jack Tom shot out to the front and won by a neck. It was a pretty piece of work and Slippery Fippence profited enormously, but Jerry Jack Tom knew exactly what had happened and loud, long and public were his lamentations.

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" ' There is no honesty these days,' he announced. ' Ye can't even trust your own kith and kin ! ' And, ' I've been stabbed in the back by me own brother ! ' he proclaimed over and over again in Cassidy's public house that night. He also announced that he would ride the living daylights out of Slippery Fippence if ever he dared to show his face against him on a racecourse again.

" That same evening Slippery Fippence and Gentleman Jimmy were celebrating their defeat in Julia Moran's, the rival public house, and it was not long before the news of Jerry Jack Tom's challenge travelled over there.

" ' Tell him,' Slippery Fippence said grandiloquently to the bearer of the news. ' Tell him that if he comes agen me at Lacken Races, he can ride his hardest and he can ride his best, an' he can ride harder than his hardest and better nor his best, and the only part of me he'll see is the back o' me jacket ! '

" Cheers greeted this speech. Slippery Fippence waved a glass of whisky in his hand to round it off, Gentleman Jimmy raised his bowler-topper, bowed to the assembled company, and ordered another round. In a few hours the whole countryside had the news that there was going to be a right fight between the brothers at Lacken.

" The brothers retired into great secrecy to prepare for the event. Both their houses became like training camps. Jerry Jack Tom had a great raw-boned bay called Red Heather that pulled like a train and Slippery Fippence a weedy chestnut thoroughbred called The Dandy, and each of them slept in a loft over his horse's box so as to be on the lookout for any interference.

" The countryside was divided, half of 'em rushing to back Red Heather, the other half going for The Dandy. There were other horses in the race but it was generally conceded that, now that the brothers were openly trying to beat each other, none of the rest had a chance. In fact there was a strong rumour that the other runners were withdrawing to leave the brothers free to fight it out between themselves.

" The only person to be worried about all this was Gentleman Jimmy and Gentleman Jimmy was very worried indeed, for if either of the brothers won he looked like losing a fortune. Gentleman Jimmy sat down and scanned the list of runners and wondered if there was any chance of a miracle happening and one of the outsiders winning.

" He took off his bowler-topper and he scratched his head and he put it on again and he furrowed his brow and while he was doing all this the door opened and the owner of one of the other runners walked in. He was no stranger to Jimmy and he bore the definite

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news that every one of the outsiders bar himself was withdrawing from the race. He himself had not quite made up his mind whether to run or not and before doing so he had a proposition to put to Jimmy.

"He put his proposition and the two of them sat down together and talked it out into the small hours. Finally they reached agreement about the financial side of the matter; a very satisfactory agreement, for it left each of them convinced that he had put it across the other. They then finished the whisky and parted.

"The next morning—and there were only two days before the race now—a grubby little boy pushed a note into Slippery Fippence's hand. This note was signed—as is usual, I believe, in such cases—*A Well-wisher*, and it told him that Jerry Jack Tom was backing his bets and had put a stack on The Dandy to win the race. Slippery Fippence ranted and swore when he got the note. He called down curses from heaven on dishonourable men. When he cooled down, however, he began to think and he thought exactly on the lines which Gentleman Jimmy and his friend had anticipated.

"He fetched from its hiding-place the roll of notes which represented his winnings on the recent race; then he paid a visit to Gentleman Jimmy and planked down the lot on Red Heather. No sooner had this been done than the same grubby little boy pushed a note into the hands of Jerry Jack Tom. This note informed Jerry Jack Tom that Slippery Fippence had just invested a large sum on the success of Red Heather. It too, oddly enough, was signed *A Well-wisher*.

"Jerry Jack Tom swore and his face set in more hatchet-like lines than ever. In half an hour's time he was knocking on the back door of Gentleman Jimmy's premises. He pushed a bundle of notes into the bookie's hand, told him to put the lot on The Dandy to win and took himself off muttering horrible things.

"I needn't tell you there was great excitement and tension on the day of the race. People walked and people went on outside cars and new-fangled motor-cars and every sort of conveyance to Lacken Hill. There was the greatest crowd that had ever been seen and you couldn't turn round with the press of people on the hill. The three-card men and the trick-of-the-loop men and the hawkers and roulette wheels did a roaring trade.

"The crowd, of course, had come to see the race between the brothers. There were only three runners in it. Red Heather and The Dandy were at even money and you could get what you liked on the outsider. By this time the feeling between the rival supporters of Jerry Jack Tom and Slippery Fippence was running pretty high and people were backing their choice in anything from shillings to

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ten-pound notes. Gentleman Jimmy was standing there on an up-turned tea-chest in his bowler-topper and covert coat looking as benign as ever and raking in the bets.

"Lacken Hill was a fine place for a race. It was a natural grandstand and there were only a couple of places on the course where the horses were hidden. It was a mile or so from the village of Lacken. It's a flat part of the country there and the chapel spire in Lacken is about the only other landmark and made one think of an old-time steeplechase.

"Red Heather and The Dandy both looked trained to a hair and fit to run for their lives. The brothers gripped their ash-plants and pulled down their caps and scowled at each other. No one could forecast which of them would win. All one could do was to back one's fancy—and hope.

"They went down to the start with Red Heather kicking and pulling and Jerry Jack Tom standing in his stirrups and cursing him. The crowd on the hill were quiet as they waited for the race of all time between the two brothers. The starter hadn't much trouble getting the three runners into line. He dropped his flag and off they went.

"The brothers were too experienced in the gentle art of losing races to start off at a snail's pace. They both got away well when the flag fell and went off at the steady hunting pace at which races were run in those days.

"There was nothing much to choose between the two of them. The third horse was lying handy about three lengths behind. They completed one circuit of the course like this and went off on their second. There was still no change in the order and all the horses were jumping perfectly. But the brothers were beginning to eye each other warily and to take surreptitious pulls on their horses' heads here and there and to go wide on corners so as to let the other fellow go ahead. The net result of all this was that neither of them succeeded in losing any ground but they slowed down the pace a bit.

"There was a dip in the ground about fifty yards from the last fence. This dip hid the riders from the crowd on the hill. By the time they came into it the scowls on the brothers' faces had deepened and Jerry Jack Tom had Red Heather's head back somewhere round his knees in an effort to hold him in.

"No sooner had the dip hidden them than Slippery Fippence drew his ash-plant from his left hand into his right and, leaning over, he hit Red Heather a real stinger across the quarters. Red Heather gave a snort and a bound, fought his head free from his rider's grip, and went for the last fence as if he was being ridden at it in a desperate finish. But Slippery Fippence, though he had

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set his rival going, soon found that he was not in much better case. In leaning over to strike Red Heather he had loosed his own hold on The Dandy's head.

"The Dandy was a fit horse and the gallop he had had round the course had scarcely made him blow. Seeing his old enemy galloping ahead he stretched out his head, got his legs under him and went after him. It looked to the rider of the third horse as if the brothers, despite themselves, were going to ride a finish, and in some agitation of mind he started to move up after them.

"When the horses came out of the dip, galloping like mad, Red Heather three lengths ahead and apparently all set to win, Gentleman Jimmy on his tea-chest was observed to turn slightly pale.

"He needn't have worried. Jerry Jack Tom couldn't stop Red Heather but there was something else that he could do. When Red Heather rose at the last fence he jabbed him hard in the mouth. Red Heather had had all sorts of things happen to him in his racing career, but this was a new one. He jumped big and he jumped bold and he liked to have his head free when he jumped, and this was something which hitherto his rider had always given to him.

"That jab in his mouth stopped him in mid-air. He hit the top of the fence and turned over into the next field. It was said by observers afterwards that as they went there was a smile of seraphic contentment on Jerry Jack Tom's face. Slippery Fippence was not much behind but, coming into the fence, he regained control of The Dandy.

"As his horse changed his feet on the top of the bank Slippery Fippence surveyed the *débâcle* below him. Red Heather lay stretched on his side; near his horse, spread-eagled like a star-fish and emitting the most artistic groans, was Jerry Jack Tom. It looked as if Slippery Fippence had the race at his mercy, which was exactly what Slippery Fippence did not want to have. No wonder his brother as he lay on the ground interrupted his series of groans with a chuckle of triumph. But Slippery Fippence was a man of resource. As he announced later—much later—the scene of woe beneath him struck him to the heart.

"'Bedad, me poor brother is kilt!' he exclaimed. 'I must go for the priest!' And with that, gathering his horse together he abandoned the race and set off across country towards the chapel and the priest's house.

"Both the brothers had quite forgotten the third entrant who went on to win as he liked."

My uncle finished speaking, drained his glass of port and lay back in his chair with a thin chuckle of ancient laughter.

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"You are a wicked old reprobate," I said to him—I cannot but think that the port which I had consumed had something to do with this outspokenness—for I had guessed for some little time back the identity of the third rider and I now knew the secret about which we had all wondered for so long. How big the bet was and how much he and Gentleman Jimmy had split between them were matters which I thought could well be left in oblivion.

"I'm surprised," I went on, "that Gentleman Jimmy didn't blackmail you."

A faint cough sounded in the shadows and the elderly butler shuffled into the candlelight. He laid an ancient, claw-like hand on my uncle's shoulder.

"'Tis long after ye should be in bed," he quavered. "An' keepin' the young gentleman up too and him with a race to ride tomorrow. Holy horrors, will ye look at the decanter! Don't you mind at all what Dr. Morrissey told you about drinkin' port?"

"Bah! That old fool!" my uncle said. "I've been tellin' Mr. Welcome how we did the McGraths. They met their match when they met up with us, eh—Jeames?"

The butler's rheumy old eyes seemed to light up for a second.

"Oh, bedad, 'twas the gas of Cork, entirely," he said with a cackle. "'Tis terrible hard on the nerves, that there bookmakin', sir," he here addressed himself to me. "What with them crooked, thievin' connivin' blayguards the McGraths I couldn't never balance me book right at all. 'Twas lucky for me when me poor nerves got too bad that your uncle was lookin' for some one to look after his house for him. I've had far greater peace of mind ever since, sir, and that's the truth of it."

His claw-like hand tightened on my uncle's shoulder, and the creases on his face folded into what I can only describe as an unholy grin as he regarded my uncle with a look of mingled affection and domination.

"Indeed them was the times entirely, but lucky it was for me that your uncle had a place for me when I needed it. A friend in need is a grand thing, that's what I always do be sayin', sir."

Then he looked me straight in the eyes. I had drunk too much port and his ancient face was wrinkled like old shoe-leather but I think, yes, I think, that he winked.

* * *

The simplest reducing diet these days is eating all you can afford.

H. H.

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STORM IN A TEA-CUP

Now for the tea of our host,
Now for the rollicking bun,
Now for the muffin and toast,
Now for the gay Sally Lunn!

W. S. GILBERT, *The Sorcerer*

That excellent and by all Physitians approved China drink, called by the Chineans *Tcha*, by other nations *Tay*, *alias Tee*, is sold at the Sultaness Head, a cophee-house in Sweetings Rents, by the Royal Exchange, London.

Advertisement in the Mercurius Politicus, September 30th, 1658

Chaos !

We had a kettle : we let it leak :
Our not repairing it made it worse.
We haven't had any tea for a week . . .
The bottom is out of the Universe !

RUDYARD KIPLING, *Natural Theology*

Something Stronger . . .

It was time, Denis thought, to move on . . . The thought of tea was making itself insistent in his mind. Tea, tea, tea. But the tea-tent was horribly thronged. Anne, with an unusual expression of grimness on her flushed face, was furiously working the handle of the urn ; the brown liquid spurted incessantly into the proffered cups. Portentous, in the farther corner of the tent, Priscilla, in her royal toque, was encouraging the villagers. In a momentary lull Denis could hear her deep, jovial laughter and her manly voice. Clearly, he told himself, this was no place for one who wanted tea. He stood irresolute at the entrance to the tent. A beautiful thought suddenly came to him : if he went back to the house, went unobtrusively, without being observed, if he tiptoed into the dining-room and noiselessly opened the little doors of the side-board—ah, then ! In the cool recess within he would find bottles and a siphon ; a bottle of crystal gin and a quart of soda water, and then for the cups that inebriate as well as cheer . . .

A minute later he was walking briskly up the shady yew-tree walk.

ALDOUS HUXLEY, *Crome Yellow*

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Secret Vice

Before this year, 1761, the drinking of tea was little known in the parish, saving among a few of the heritors' houses on a Sabbath evening; but now it became very rife: yet the commoner sort did not let it be known that they were taking to the new luxury, especially the elderly women, who, for that reason, had their ploys in out-houses and by-places, just as the witches lang syne had their sinful possets and galravitchings; and they made their tea for common in the pint-stoup, and drank it out of caps and luggies, for there were but few among them that had cups and saucers. Well do I remember one night in the harvest, in this very year as I was taking my twilight dauner aneath the hedge along the back side of Thomas Thorl's yard, meditating on the goodness of Providence, and looking at the sheaves of victual in the field, that I heard his wife, and two three other carlins, with their Bohea in the inside of the hedge, and no doubt but it had a lacing of the Conek, for they were all crackling like pen-guns. But I gave them a sign, by a loud host that Providence sees all, and it skailed the bike; for I heard them, like guilty creatures, whispering, and gathering up their truck-pots and trenchers, and cowering away home.

JOHN GALT, *Annals of the Parish*, 1821

Glorious Insipidity

Tea! Thou soft, thou sober, sage, and venerable Liquid, thou innocent Pretence for bringing the Wicked of both Sexes together in a Morning; thou Female Tongue-running, Smile-smoothing, Heart-opening, Wink-tipping Cordial, to whose glorious Insipidity I owe the happiest Moment of my Life, let me fall prostrate thus, and sip, sip, sip, thus adore thee!

COLLEY CIBBER, *The Lady's Last Stake, or the Wife's Resentment*

At Home

A set, solemn, Sunday tea-drinking in the Country—wholly unsupported either by a dinner before, or a supper after it, and to which every house within five miles has contributed a Quizz, a Cat, or a Miss of 14;—a meeting without music—without cards—without (for once) even the voice of Scandal!—and of which the prominent, nay *only* feature, is that of taking weak tea in a dumb, motionless circle, with not a sound to be heard but the murmur of sipping lips.

JAMES BERESFORD, 1764-1840, *The Miseries of Human Life*

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Tea Party

" Crawling at your feet," said the Gnat (Alice drew her feet back in some alarm), " you may observe a Bread-and-Butterfly. Its wings are thin slices of Bread-and-butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar."

" And what does *it* live on ? "

" Weak tea with cream in it."

A new difficulty came into Alice's head. " Supposing it couldn't find any ? " she suggested.

" Then it would die, of course."

" But that must happen very often," Alice remarked thoughtfully.

" It always happens," said the Gnat.

LEWIS CARROLL, *Through the Looking Glass*

Addict

When I was a boy I knew Nature as a child knows its nurse, and Tea I denounced for a drug. I found to support this fine instinct many arguments, all of which are still sound, though not one of them would prevent me now from drinking my twentieth cup.

HILAIRE BELLOC, *On Nothing*

A Stirring of the Leaves

Miss Hutchinson's great-grandmother was one of a party who sat down to the first pound of tea that ever came into Penrith. It was sent as a present, and without directions how to use it. They boiled the whole at once in a kettle, and sat down to eat the leaves with butter and salt ; and they wondered how any person would like such a dish.

ROBERT SOUTHEY, *Commonplace Book*

Nightcap

Now stir the fire and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.

WILLIAM COWPER, 1731–1800, *The Task*

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TURNING POINT

"He's not your sort," said Liz. "He never will be"

by I. A. R. WYLIE

THE huge car purred like a pleased cat as she swung round between the stone pillars at the entrance and turned into the Giffords' drive. Mr. Clive Gifford, who had had the creature built in France to his own specifications, called her the Prima Donna. Primrose-yellow, low-slung, fourteen feet long, festooned with gadgets and sizzling with Gallic temperament, she could, when she felt like it, pass anything on the road. When she didn't, when a spot of dust or a rough gear-shift upset her works, it took the most sensitive handling to get them on the move again.

Liz's father, Jim Hipps, boss of Hipps' Garage, and Liz herself by this time knew most of her tricks. The two of them, with young Johnny Gifford, who had spent a summer in France with his father, ostensibly acquiring culture and a French accent, had too often crowded together in Hipps' inspection pit or peered side by side into the mysterious maze of wires, piping and sparking plugs.

Besides, Johnny had a flair for distressed or merely bad-tempered motors. It was like a doctor's gift for diagnosis. He had a bedside manner. "*Allons, mon petit chou-chou,*" he would coax with a not noticeably French accent, "just tell poppa where it hurts," and the stone-cold Prima Donna would suddenly tick over, as though in the midst of a fit of operatic tantrums a bouquet had been handed to her.

Liz drove past the big lighted house to the car park. Bill Somers, the Giffords' chauffeur, who was due to spend the night disentangling stately limousines, rakish sports cars and mere jalopies, welcomed her sourly.

"So you've got the old buzzard on the wing again," he said. He helped her slide out from behind the wheel. "Big goings-on," he observed unnecessarily.

She could hear them. A ten-piece orchestra, playing a jaunty fox-trot, announced that Johnny had passed his exam. He was a Stanton freshman. His father's *alma mater*, brooding over the tree-shaded little town, like a big grey hen, had at last taken him under her wing. Liz tossed back her short brown curls. The music danced in her

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heart. Besides, she was so pleased. She knew what it meant.

Johnny had told her, perched on her office desk, earnest, even a little desperate-sounding. " I've got to make it, Liz," he'd said, a smear of the Prima Donna's oil on his blunt, freckled nose. " I've got to."

Well, there he was. He'd made it. *Good for you, Johnny.*

Liz strolled back the way she'd come, but then made a sudden little detour so that she stood out, a slender, rather lonely-looking figure in the square of light thrown by the big French window on to the flaming green stretch of lawn. In her slacks and sweater she might have been a boy, peering wistfully into the window of a sweet shop.

Bill Somers thought, *She ain't exactly pretty. But she's a winner.* Some chap was going to be darned lucky. A head on her too. Everyone knew she ran the business end of her old man's garage. And she could handle any car, even the Prima Donna, as well as Bill himself.

Really, she wasn't feeling either lonely or wistful. Only a little keyed up. It was the music, and knowing how Johnny felt. She picked him out of the stream of dancers flowing smoothly through the light like gay-coloured fish in an aquarium—Johnny in his new white dinner jacket with a carnation in his buttonhole and his cheek pressed to Diana Foster's cheek.

Diana and Johnny weren't exactly engaged. It was an understanding which went back to their kindergarten days when Diana had been a sort of fairy-tale little girl. Now she was the Débutante of the Year with her picture in the society columns. A radiant blonde.

Johnny would sit on Liz's desk and show her the cuttings and talk and talk, regardless of Liz, who was trying to make out the monthly bills. He seemed to like to hang around, in vacation time, talking and sometimes lending a hand with this and that. Maybe, having lost his mother, too, and with no brothers and sisters, he was lonely. It would be different now. Once in a while he might drop in to say " Hullo."

But it was one thing to be a six-foot schoolboy in the Merrick School, where they guaranteed to cram even Johnny so full of education he'd bluff the College Board. A Stanton freshman was something else—a man with a man's life to lead. When he graduated he'd go into his uncle's Wall Street office and become a big shot and marry Diana. *Well, so long, Johnny. It's been nice knowing you. Good luck. Good everything. You're a good guy. You deserve it.*

By now the music had worked down into her feet. She began to dance, irrepressibly, like a little girl. Bill Somers came out of his gloom to take notice.

" Want a partner, Liz ? "

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She stopped at once. She said coldly, " I was just having fun," and turned and stalked, hands in her trouser pockets and her head up, into the tree-shaded avenue. She was whistling to the tag end of the fox-trot, just to show someone, maybe herself, that she didn't give a damn.

Clive Gifford had made up a bridge four with Mr. and Mrs. Foster and Hardy Merrick. They sat in the brown, book-lined library, just within pleasant hearing of the music and under the radiant portrait of Johnny's mother. (It had been painted soon after her marriage, by a famous painter who, Gifford suspected not without tolerant amusement, had fallen in love with her.) Then Johnny had been born and she had died.

Between hands, Clive Gifford glanced up at the grave, charming face—a baffled, frowning look. If she had lived he might have found out what, if anything, lay behind that withdrawn sadness. Perhaps nothing. He'd always known, of course, that she wasn't clever. She'd known it herself. When he'd teased her out of her dreaming silence she would say simply, " I've nothing to say, Clive." But with the servants or some neighbour he'd heard her chirping like a bird let out of its cage into the free sunlight. It had made him obscurely angry.

Johnny took after her—except that her fair loveliness had been somehow translated into a boyish homeliness. Thank heaven, at least he had the Gifford build. He was big and husky. If he hadn't cracked up his knee in that wild, misjudged tackle, he might, one day, have got into the Stanton team.

The Giffords, for generations, had been great athletes. There was a standing Stanton joke that the Trophy Room in the gym. belonged to them. Clive himself had been a star full-back whose record, in his last year, had become almost a legend. Well, it was a bitter, disappointing business. He arranged his cards deliberately.

" Two no trumps—"

" Three hearts—"

Hardy Merrick glanced across at his partner's handsome, moody face. He and Clive Gifford had graduated together—rivals for top honours rather than friends. But he knew how the other man was feeling. The astute realization of what a successful *alumnus* would pay to get a dim-wit son into his *alma mater* had given birth to the Merrick School. It was, Merrick knew, almost notoriously successful.

Getting Johnny Gifford over the hurdles might even rank as a sort of top-notch academic scandal. Whether Johnny would stay the course was something else, and out of Merrick's hands. Poor Johnny. A nice kid. But even the decimal system had almost floored

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him. Merrick took a glass from the proffered tray and raised it.

"To Johnny!" he said. "May he continue to follow in his old man's footsteps."

"Thanks." Perhaps Gifford suspected a subtle gibe. He had sounded curt—almost aggressive. He plunged quickly. "Four no trumps—"

Johnny danced well. You hardly noticed his faint limp, which was much more noticeable when he walked. Diana rested lightly in his arms. She wondered whether Clarissa, her class-mate at Smith who was dancing with Mark Hanley, envied her.

Johnny was no world-beater—just strong, upstanding and so steadily in love he made you feel rather uncomfortably like a household fixture. (A cradle-to-the-grave affair, without a dash of uncertainty, might become distinctly wearing.) Johnny was a year behind her on the graduation road, owing to that crushed knee-cap. Though what his knee-cap had to do with his wooden head she didn't know.

It meant that she would have to wait about on the side lines for him—which wouldn't be in the least funny. Boys didn't care so much for girls who were already, as it were, bespoken. However, she'd promised. And the Giffords had stacks of money. Mrs. John Gifford would have all the fun there was.

"Happy?" he whispered to her.

"Sure."

"I am. You know, I was scared. I didn't think I'd made it. It would have broken dad's heart."

"What about breaking mine?" She pulled back a little to smile up at him. She always said what she knew people wanted to hear. It cost nothing even if it didn't mean much. She'd been voted the Most Popular Girl. She felt his deep shuddering sigh of gratitude.

"I'd like to think I could—break it, I mean."

"Don't ever try, Johnny."

"I never shall."

He wouldn't—ever. With Mark Hanley, now, you'd never be so sure. Life would be day-to-day adventure. On the other hand, he hadn't a bean or even the hope of one.

Two minutes to go. The best that Stanton could hope for was a tie. And Jeffrey, the Stanton captain, had just fumbled an easy forward pass. The groan from Stanton's side sounded as though it had been torn out of the bowels of the earth.

Johnny, huddled at his father's side, the bitter east wind in his

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aching face, knew just how he felt. Clive Gifford was near to angry tears. He was remembering his own last game—those three last, glorious, historic touch-downs. If only Johnny could have growled at him from behind clenched teeth, " Just wait till I get going, dad." He never would.

For a moment the fast-moving scene below him dissolved. He was back on Merrick Field. He was hearing his father shout to him, " Carry on, Johnny." He'd known what challenge meant in pride and hope. And he'd done his desperate, disastrous best. He'd tried too hard. When they'd carried him off the field the coach had said bitterly, " What d'you think you are—a flying saucer ? " And his father had said, " Bad luck ! " but in a flat, colourless voice. They both knew it wasn't bad luck—just rotten bad play. But no one knew how hard he'd tried.

His father stood up. " All over but the shouting." He was thinking, too, of that last game. That his son should have cracked himself up for the sake of a silly schoolboy tussle, which didn't matter one way or another, seemed an unforgettable stupidity. But there it was—his only son was a fool.

They made their way in bleak, awkward silence through the milling crowds back to Main Street. They didn't know what to say to each other. Then his father stopped short. He tried his best, Johnny knew, to sound casual and friendly.

" I think I'll turn into the club, Johnny."

So now he was alone. Nowhere much to go. By rights, he ought to get back to his rooms and his books. But at the very thought of them his head began to ache again. Instead he drifted down a side road to Hipps' garage, where Liz would have been listening in and feeling bad too. And there she was, at her desk, just where he had imagined her. The sight of her comforted him a little. Her eyes under the straight brows were the clear brown of chestnuts. They matched her hair.

" Licked," Johnny said. " Dad almost howled."

It was always his father, Liz thought indignantly. The man might have been the boy, so easily hurt that Johnny had to take care of him, ease him over the bumps, make up to him for his disappointments—even in Johnny himself.

" He's so darned proud of the old place," Johnny muttered. " He's part of it. I've got to be part of it, too, or bust."

" Of course. You will be."

" I don't know. Maybe I'll just bust. Dean Potter had me on the carpet. He doesn't like Merrick's spoon-fed babies. He sort of warned me to put my best foot forward—or else."

" What else ? "

" Plough."

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"You won't—"

He sighed. "I ought to be cramming right now—instead of cluttering up this place. I expect you wonder sometimes why I do."

She bent her head over her books. "You don't clutter. But I've wondered."

"It's queer. I suppose it goes back to that summer after my smash, when dad sent me to that Montana ranch for tutoring. I couldn't do what those other kids did—ride and hike and all that. It was sort of lonely. So I'd take my jalopy and drive over to the filling station on the high road. A nice old fellow owned it—called Pop Earnest—and he let me work around. Sometimes there was a repair to do, or a flat to fix. Small stuff. But I got sort of handy. I'd look forward to slipping over. It was like going somewhere where I belonged—like going home."

He dug his hands into his pockets. His face couldn't have been redder than it was already. "When he saw me coming the old boy used to yell out, 'Hiyer, son,' just as though he were sort of pleased—"

"So we make you think of Pop Earnest," Liz said. "That's nice. That's wonderful."

She sounded so unexpectedly testy that he grinned at her. When he grinned he wasn't homely. At least he was good to look at. His eyes were an honest, kindly blue.

"Now I've made you angry. It suits you, Liz. I'm sorry though. I'm enough to make an angel hop. Always flying off the handle and grousing about myself. Forget it. What d'you say to having a soda together?"

"Sorry, Johnny." But she sounded mollified. "I've a lot of bills to make out. A big one for the Prima Donna. She's in dry dock right now."

"Let's take a look."

At any rate she could and would do that much. They stuck their heads, like hungry birds pecking at grain, into the huge car's bewildering interior. From the other side Liz's father lifted a grimy, exasperated face.

"The old devil's got me this time," he snorted. "Can't tell what ails her."

Johnny came up presently with a loose wire and the familiar smudge on his nose. Jim Hipps grunted.

"You sure have a way with you. Any time you want a job, son, it's right here waiting for you."

They all laughed. And Johnny hurried off, looking like a huge grey bear on the track of a kill and feeling much better.

They fluttered down from the express on to the Stanton platform

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like a flock of gaily-coloured birds. The alertly waiting bird dogs set on to them, snatching at their suitcases or giving tongue vigorously as their quarry came in sight. The haggard-looking young man with the brown-haired girl in slacks gazed about him wildly.

"Maybe she missed the connection. Maybe she's not coming."

"Why shouldn't she?" Liz snapped.

She nearly added that Diana Foster would have to break a leg to miss a Founders' Night dance. But she was trying hard not to be nasty. Besides, she had her own business to attend to. She'd brought the Prima Donna, fresh from an overhaul, to meet Johnny's father and some old classmates, and unless she could thumb a ride back she'd have to walk. Johnny had his sports car presented to him by his wild Wall Street uncle on the occasion of his passing for Stanton, and of course he'd ask her to come along with Diana—if he thought of it. But apart from the fact that she'd rather walk, he was looking too distraught to think clearly about anything.

It was queer, Liz reflected, trying to be unconcerned, how a young man, neatly and even nattily dressed in sports clothes, could look as though he'd been pulled through a bush backwards. And he hadn't been round to the Hipps' Garage for days. Which was queer, too. Not that she hadn't expected it—but not quite so suddenly, not as though something important had snapped somewhere.

Watching him, she saw his face clear. He waved and shouted, "Hullo there!" and ran down the platform towards the golden head flashing like a beacon light on the surface of a turbulent river. Liz croaked after him, "Have a wonderful time, Johnny!" But of course he did not hear her. He'd got hold of Diana's suitcase and with the other hand he was clutching her arm as though the light spring breeze might blow her out of his yearning sight.

"Oh, gosh, Di, I thought you'd never come."

She walked passively beside him. She wondered if Mark were around somewhere. He might not have a bean. But he was fun. She became more aware of Johnny. He was hurting her arm. He was so desperately, tiresomely in earnest that he made her feel almost cross.

"Is it true, Johnny, what you said in your letter?"

"Sure."

"I thought it might be a sort of joke."

"It isn't as funny as all that."

"What are you going to do?"

"I dunno. Not yet. Of course Uncle George is out. Even his office boys have to be Stanton graduates. But, Di"—he was almost pleading—"we'll make out somehow. We've got each other."

She released herself gently. Mark came in sight, looking, not

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too ardently, for his own girl. She waved gaily and he called back to her.

"Be seeing you tonight, Mark."

"You bet your life."

Hipps' Garage stayed open till the small hours on Founders' Night. There were always cars that had to be salvaged from convivial, head-on encounters or that had turned light-heartedly into drive-ways that weren't there.

From where she sat at her desk, Liz could hear the dance music from the hall like the murmur of a far-off sea. She tried not to tap her foot to its rhythm or to think of anything but the pile of bills in front of her. When she looked up and saw Johnny she was sure, for a moment, that she was just imagining him. But then she would never have imagined him in white tie and tails—the only permissible outfit for Founders' Night—so elegant and yet so grey-faced and battered-looking that she stood up as though he might collapse into her arms.

He gave a sort of laugh. "It's O.K. I just didn't seem to have anywhere else to go. Mind if I sit down?"

He hunched himself on her desk. But he didn't fold his arms or kick his heels after his usual casual fashion. He was like a tired runner who'd been beaten at the end of a long race.

"I'm ploughed," he said. "Yes—that's it. Dean Potter told me days ago. They've stretched all the points they could—for dad's sake—just in the hope that I'd improve. But of course I didn't. I've told Di. She—she was sweet about it. But she says she can't wait forever and of course that's right. Dead right. So there I am, Liz. I'm finished." He pushed his hand through his thick, rough hair. He couldn't tell her about his father—about that aloof acceptance of disaster, that brief, impersonal reflection, *Well, I suppose we might push you through some small Middle Western college.* He stumbled on hurriedly. "I've tried to enlist. But the way the Army looks at me I'm a cripple, and the Air Force thinks I'm colour blind." He gave his high-pitched laugh again. "I'm Clive Gifford's son and I just can't make the grade."

Liz began, "You can—" but stopped herself. He wasn't listening. In any case, what she thought couldn't possibly matter.

He stumbled on. "I didn't know her. But I guess I'm like my mother. I heard someone say once, 'Beautiful, of course, but dumb.' I wasn't meant to hear. But I nearly barged in and sloshed the lot of them. But you can't slosh your own aunts, can you?"

"It's not often done," Liz admitted.

"Anyhow, that goes for me too—except that I'm not beautiful."

He sat there lost in his own thoughts. Last Founders' Day

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Stanton had given its distinguished *alumnus*, Clive Gifford, an honorary degree. In his splendid academic robes he'd been the handsomest figure in the procession and his son, sitting in the back row, had almost burst with pride. Well, now he was in the back row for keeps.

It was queer that a young man who had such trouble with the simplest equations should understand so well how the older man felt. It was as though his own nerves had been stripped bare and ached with Clive Gifford's bitterness and disappointment. A father whose son couldn't carry on for him hadn't any future. He was a sort of dead end. When Johnny saw his father glance up at the glowing girl's portrait and the ironic twist of the proud mouth, he understood that too.

Johnny slipped off the desk. He did something so unexpected that it left Liz breathless and speechless. He bent over and kissed her gently on both cheeks.

"Thanks for everything, Liz. It's been grand knowing you."

Jim Hipps told her. It wasn't easy. She and Johnny had grown up together, as children do in small towns, even if they don't live on the same side of the railway tracks. They play together. They drink their sodas at the drug-store side by side. Even after they're grown up and gone their different ways they never quite forget each other. Jim guessed that Liz would take it hard.

"They've found the poor kid's car," he said. "It was left standing by the river. They're dragging it now."

She didn't take it in the way that he'd expected. She simply closed her account book with an indignant snap and blew out of the office as though, her father thought, all hell were after her.

The Prima Donna had had a minor tantrum. Liz eased her out of the repair shop and drove her home. Though the spring dusk had set in, there were no lights showing in the Gifford house. It looked not exactly in mourning but as though for a long time it had been left deserted. The front door stood open, so there was nothing to stop her. Besides, nothing could have stopped her. She'd never been inside the house before. But she knew it as Johnny knew it.

The library would be to the right of the great hall. She foresaw its sombre, book-lined luxury, and the girl over the carved-oak mantelpiece, her frail loveliness, her look of innocent young sorrow —even the look of Johnny in the blue eyes, fixed on the distance as though she were waiting for something wonderful to happen, or for someone who never came. The last sunlight rested benignly on the gentle face so that it seemed to shine with an inner brightness of its own.

From where she stood, at first Liz couldn't see the man huddled

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between the wings of the big high-backed chair. But she tracked him as a big-game hunter tracks his quarry.

She came away from the door and stood squarely opposite him, and he stared back at her with bleak indifference as though nothing mattered or could surprise him any more. His face was grey and hard-set. His hands, clenched on the chair arms, were bloodless. Somehow they reassured her. At least they made her hate him less.

" I've brought back that crazy car of yours, Mr. Gifford," she said, " and I want to ask you a question."

He raised himself to ask one of his own. " You're Jim Hipps' daughter, aren't you ? "

" That's me," she told him. " ' Liz ' to my friends."

" Well, whoever you are and whatever you want to know, you might have telephoned—"

" I might. But you might not have answered." She settled herself more firmly in her tracks. " What's that Montana ranch where you sent Johnny with his busted knee to watch other kids having a good time ? "

He was too startled—too stung by the suddenness and audacity of the attack to realize that he was actually answering her. " If you mean the Lazy Bar B Ranch at Great Falls—" He cut himself short. " Incidentally, he wasn't sent there for a good time. He was meant to study. What he did, God only knows."

" Maybe he tried to find a way to live," she said absently—" his way." She seemed, for the moment, to have forgotten the man opposite her, to have brushed him out of her consciousness.

She stood at ease, her hands loosely clasped behind her back, looking up at that other girl. She talked about her, almost to herself. " Johnny said she was lovely. She was too. And she wasn't dumb either. She knew a lot of things—different things—like Johnny. I guess you made her feel she was just too dumb to live. I guess she was so unhappy she was glad to die."

He had a violent impulse to stand up—to take this slender, incredible girl by the shoulders and thrust her out of sight. Sitting there put him at a disadvantage—gave him an absurd, infuriating sense of being at her mercy. He managed to say coldly :

" You are an outrageously impertinent young woman and your language is a disgrace—"

" It could be worse," she told him—" a whole lot worse. I'm holding myself in."

" You might at least have the decency to remember—"

" —that they're dragging the river ? " She raised scornful eyebrows at him. " What for ? Johnny isn't there. Johnny wouldn't run out—not that way." She came an aggressive step closer to him. She'd given up holding herself in.

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" Besides, what do you care, Mr. Gifford ? You don't really give a damn. You're like that painted-up gold-digging blonde. You never cared about Johnny—not the real Johnny. You never wanted to know what sort of boy he really was, or what he wanted. He had to be what *you* wanted—Carry-on-Johnny—so that when you're dead folks'll say, ' Remember the guy who made those three touch downs the last game in 1920—the guy they voted the best-dressed, smartest man of his year ? Well, that's Johnny, his son, the spitting image of him—' "

" Get out ! " he growled at her. " You must be crazy ! "

" Not crazy. Just hopping mad. I've been that way for a long time. Now I'm going to hop till I'm through . . . So there it was. Johnny had to be clever like you—but he was just clever like himself. He had to play games like you—and he ruined his leg trying. The poor dumb cluck wanted so terribly to please you—to make you proud of him. He'd say, ' Liz, if I don't make the grade it'll break dad's heart.' "

" He said that ? " The man's voice sounded suddenly subdued —a little rough round the edges.

" Yes, he did. I'd want to slap him."

" Did you ? "

She shook her head. She said rather wistfully, " You do think I'm a wild cat, don't you ? I am sometimes. But I don't hurt people —I mean people I—" She broke off, and then went on with renewed fierceness. " You keep your hands off him too. He's not your sort. He never will be. He's better. He's good and kind and honest. He knows what makes things tick. He's worth a world of cock-eyed stuffed shirts."

The man murmured, " Aren't you being rather rude ? "

" I'm doing my best. Now I've done it. I've been rude to Johnny's father. He'd never forgive me—" She advanced upon him threateningly. " If ever you tell him—"

" I won't ever. I dislike extremely being slapped. The encounter," Clive Gifford added formally, " rests a profound secret between you and me, Miss Hipps."

She cocked a doubtful head at him. Something had happened. The grey, stony face had colour in it. It seemed to be breaking up into new lines. She had an uneasy feeling that the enemy had shifted his ground—that he was stalking her.

" Well—thanks," she said.

She swung on her heel and now he stood up slowly.

" May I ask where you think you're going now ? "

" To find him."

" He's none of your business. Or is he ? "

She looked over her shoulder to give him an almost friendly

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little grin. "Of course he's my business. He's what *I* want."

The filling station made a bright spot of red against the valley's shining greens. The young man bent over a worn-out flat looked up for a moment, shading his eyes against the sun. Someone was walking down the grey strip of highway. No one in his senses walked in these parts. Johnny took a deep breath.

He didn't, at first, believe what he saw. She wore her familiar workaday slacks and the sun had burned her Eastern rosiness brown and taken the skin off her nose. She wasn't beautiful at all. But she was like a dream from which he didn't want to wake. He strode down on her and took her by the shoulders. He almost shook her to be sure of her.

"Liz, how did you know?"

"I've got a head, haven't I? I used it. Pop Earnest's filling station, Montana. That's what I looked for—where you belonged. But that's over. I've come to take you home—"

His hands dropped. He stood very straight, his bright thick hair shining in the sunlight. "No," he said.

"—my home." She conceded, "Our home." Now it was her turn to shake him. She sounded breathless and a little incoherent. "Dad's garage. It'll be yours one of these days—the best garage in Stanton. After all, you'll be his son-in-law."

"You're crazy, Liz."

"I'm marrying you."

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him, as he had once kissed her, gently on either cheek. He kissed her, swift and hard, on the mouth, as though the kiss had been delayed for a long time.

"You're still crazier," he told her. "I can't go back. Johnny Gifford running a garage in Clive Gifford's town—it'd break dad's heart."

"Never mind his heart!" She linked her arm through his. "If you've got a jalopy, let's go. The Prima Donna got mad again. She's ditched us—five miles down the road. Your dad says he doesn't want a Stanton graduate. He wants a good mechanic. And will you please come right away?"

* * *

LET THEM SAY!

There is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.

OSCAR WILDE

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TO THE NORTH

A prisoner below, the pintail saw the wild duck whirring up the morning sky

by FRANK STUART

THE storm lasted a long time, but when it passed, the rain died away, and the evening became pale, lemon-coloured and clear. The sea, now an infinity of shining green and silver, became so smooth towards evening that the ducks could see below them the passing of a glimmering herring shoal and bubbling seaweeds bowing to and fro. As the sky reddened to sunset, the throng of wild birds rode dreamlike on a rose-swept bay, now no longer things of earth or air but part of the beauty of the singing seas.

During that quiet night, a new sound crept trespassing into their world of peace. It began infinitely far away, a feeling rather than a sound, that came to them through the water under their breasts, faintly and disturbingly changing its lullaby caresses. All were aware of it. The sound became more audible, a rhythm murmuring through the waves and very slowly gathering intensity.

Presently, at the extreme end of the shimmering sea road of moonlight that seemed to stretch out of this world, there appeared a pinpoint of light. This slowly approached, taking the dark and distant shape of a great ship luminous with light. It passed far out from the coast, its rows of port-holes magically golden, smoke drifting away behind it like a splendid plume, the whirl of its thrusting propellers making the water shudder. To the ducks, it looked like a huge argus-eyed creature swimming across the sea, and long after it had passed swelling waves came riding in and lifted the birds and went slapping over the island mud.

As the dawn came, the mood of tranquillity faded from the flock. Mingled with impatience at the delay in their journey was a redoubled urge to push on northwards to the mysterious goal that alone could quiet the urgency of the migration instinct.

Mounting excitement ran from group to group; hurriedly feeding, they watched each other, quacking and whistling and stretching their wings, so that the beautiful bars of colour across the feathers were splendidly displayed. The chattering, preening and fussing as they awaited the general move into the air

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disturbed the pintail drake, and he was becoming increasingly resentful of the presence of the white stranger and his closeness to the pintail duck.

Suddenly turning, he swam strongly down the creek, right round the distant point of the island, as if action gave his discontent a sort of relief. He went fast along the shore, examining with eager eyes the variations in colour and clearness of the water over which he sailed, watching where mud eddies swirled, assessing each little current and looking by habit rather than hungrily for small shellfish or other titbits of food.

He was only casually aware of a very swift-running current that curled past the snout of a mud spit and bore him racing along an unknown side of the island. It was at that moment that he saw the shrimps. Translucent grey, speckled with brown, they were swimming rapidly in the current over a stretch of sand. As he dipped to take the first one, its paddle-like rear jerked convulsively but too late to evade the plunge of that slaty bill. Down it went along his throat with a rush that sent tickling satisfaction to the tips of his feathers, and swiftly and methodically he tried to snap up all the rest. Twisting, evading, using the current, seeking deeper water, they fled quivering along. One—two—three—four—a dive that missed the fifth, and then they vanished into some secret cranny.

Aware of a peculiar coldness and heaviness, the drake looked up. He was sailing along offshore from the island in a sheeny iridescence that surfaced this part of the clear shine of the sea as though some obscene creature had breathed upon and stained with beastliness something beautiful that it hated.

The drake, angry and alarmed, struck deep into the water, sending himself shearing through tiny waves back the way he had come. But the greenish metallic gleam seemed to swim with him, and the water that all his life before had lapped so comfortingly about him, now struck piercing cold at his breast and sides as if he were naked. Furious, he leapt upwards, meaning to take flight—but his wings, sopped with something thick and heavy, stuck to his sides for a flash of time, rose too late, dropped and stuck again as he scuttered, beating and trampling with his feet to try to get into the air, and he flopped with a resounding splash deep into scummy water.

He went in as if he had been flung, a way he had never hit the water before. He twisted over with his head under, then came right side up with a terrified squawk. The immeasurable sea all about him was frightening and strange for the first time in his life, and he sat there on the water, his heart pounding, afraid to move yet with every nerve frantically warning him to get away.

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The oil on the sea around him, oil carelessly jettisoned by the liner in the dawn, horribly soothed the life out of the little dancing waves, and glistened with the stale glitter of a dead eye. Opening and shutting his bill, the drake began to paddle powerfully against the current that curled along so smooth and swift, parting on each side of his sodden breast-feathers, trying to drag him back in its grip.

He had not troubled about the strength of this current when he sailed along it alone because, all his life, he had been free of the air. Now, as the instinct to fly where he could not swim stirred his wing-muscles, he ceased to understand that suddenly he had failed in a power as natural to him as breathing.

With a savage effort, he again tried to leap upwards. But the heavy oiliness prevented him from getting his wings up in time, nor would the flight-feathers spread, nor his tail feathers part for steering. Once more he floundered, kicking spray, actually jumped into the air without any proper lift from his wings, and rolled heavily and painfully down and along the greasy water, and submerged. He came up pitifully, riding on it easily enough, but smothered in oil now and utterly bewildered, not knowing what to do next.

The current was carrying him backwards away from the mud island. A lifetime of water-knowledge rushed instinctively to his aid without relieving the terror that gripped him, and he began to swim with quick, hard leg-strokes that lifted him a little from the water and sent him gliding along, not directly in the face of the race but at an angle to it. He found he could swim and make headway, and the urgent violence of the exercise, using his utmost reserves of strength, sagacity and skill, momentarily warmed him. Yet he soon felt an increasing and dreadful chill freezing skin, bones and muscles, where the oil had saturated the fine down that normally insulated him against the water's cold.

Foot by foot, he edged out of the faster run of the tide race. Almost more alarming than anything else was to feel so much alone on the greatness of the sea, as though there were no more of his kind anywhere in the world. The water he had reached had lost that sucking pull and was almost still. But panic flooded him again as he found that he was working harder than ever, yet going slower than when facing the sluice. His body seemed heavy as if he had aged suddenly to the edge of death. His wings stuck tightly down, and his body was sodden and thin, with all his lovely down dankly clinging like some icy physical blanket of fear pressing on pimpled nakedness.

Struggling on, he rounded the mud spit and almost collapsed

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in a friendly eddy of the tide that began leisurely to bear him, still faintly swimming, into the mouth of a creek where he had spent the previous night.

It was at that moment that the hundreds of wild ducks went whirring up the morning sky.

A prisoner below, he saw them spreading their wings, stretching up, tucking their feet comfortably under them, swinging out into ranks and places, the leaders rising high ahead and wheeling with delight towards the calling north. Once more instinct overwhelmed the dreadful new understanding that he could not fly, and he made his greatest leap, but this time his wings would not act at all, and he merely hurled himself along the sea and crashed into it again without even going under, his legs scrabbling and beating beneath him and sending the water foaming round.

High at the front of the leading edge of the echelon, the glowing white of the strange drake caught the level rays of the rising sun, and the little duck flew close beside him. The last of the migrants was up off the marsh and in the air, and the whole formation, tightening and shaping as it went, swished away northwards.

He lay on the water as he had fallen, his head sunk down, his body slumped, his proud pointed tail drooped along the shimmering slime.

He did not see the pintail duck swoop out ahead of the rest and come tearing down in a great circle, nor the careless zoom of the white drake and his lazy wheel in the sky as he followed high above her. For a moment there was confusion in the sky-wide flying wing of birds. The front of the formation appeared to melt a little; then other leaders, craning their necks angrily and uttering shrill, eager whistles, darted into the vacant places, and the steady advance that had for one moment hesitated returned to its smooth speed once more, leaving the three truants behind and below.

A hoarse *quark* above him jerked the collapsed pintail drake as though he had been touched by a powerful shock. He stared up and became aware of the two birds, the white high above the mottled brown, circling over him.

The duck, taking no notice of her follower, darted off northwards after the flock, cried out anxiously, then swooped round and back, almost touching the water beside the swimming drake, and tearing away north again. He made no effort to follow. He knew now that he could not fly, that any further wild effort to do so might even be fatal, so sodden, cold and heavy did he feel. He had never been conscious of his body before, but now it dragged him down and frightened him. He could swim still, but there was already an unbalanced, dangerous feeling that made him anxious to get out

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of the water on to land, though at ordinary times land seemed less safe to him than either water or air.

The duck came scuttering down on the sea between him and the mainland shore, and swam swiftly and lightly towards him. Above her, only a few feet over the water, the white mallard made a whistling, graceful circle, and began to sweep off northwards, flying very low, in pursuit of the flock that was now a hazy cloud on the horizon.

The move was well-timed, and the duck cried out miserably as she watched him go. But she turned suddenly and began to swim fast towards the mainland shore, glancing back and calling sharply. Impelled as by some force outside himself, the pintail drake kicked strongly, swimming after her, but found himself alarmingly heavy and low in the water. This made him struggle, lifting himself with his efforts; he forged painfully along, the ripples breaking sluggishly away before him.

The duck jumped off the water, encouraging him to fly, but he made no effort to respond. His whole being seemed to measure the distance that still remained between him and the shore. It seemed that he must either sink with the slowly-burdening weight of oil-stuck and waterlogged feathers, or else the frightful strain of the effort to swim so far in that condition would kill him. His legs beat more slowly. His whole body was racked with pain.

The duck had spun round and was swimming again just ahead, and once more she uttered that anxious, choking *quark*. At the sound, the white mallard dropped lightly close beside her, between her and the struggling drake. He swam round her fast and gracefully, his head up, then sprang into swift flight, urging her to come; as he turned north, he uttered a persuasive and resonant cry. Her head jerked to him, her wings shivered; then she resolutely started swimming again, looking back for the sodden pintail drake to follow her.

The sea picture faded from his eyes. He ceased to remember that he was swimming towards land. He seemed to be floating on an infinitely icy and unhorizoned water, his leaden legs slowly beating, his oil-soiled plumage sinking him lower and flatter on waves that now, each one, struck him a harder, colder blow. Only one link with life remained, the patch of speckled soft brown feathers sailing on ahead of him, magnetically dragging him on.

After a time, he felt the shallows under his feet. Slowly, he staggered among the pebbles that a receding wave rolled back under him. He found himself on a shore. He would have sunk down, but with a wild cry the duck ran close past him and lured him up the beach beyond the waterline. There he collapsed, his feet

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fallen under him anyhow, one wing awkwardly a little outspread. He lay as if dying. Even his eyes shut.

He heard and knew that the white mallard walked close by him. Vague anger stirred in him, but he could not move. The graceful white bird shot up into the air, and as the duck watched that lovely launching, he called urgently to her and once more swooped off towards the north. She quivered with desire, but remained, frightened, on the lonely beach.

It looked as if the pintail drake were dead. For a long time, he lay motionless. The little duck hurried agitatedly near him, then away, then back. The white mallard casually returned and alighted at her side.

Presently, the soaked figure on the beach stirred, seemed to pull itself together, and slowly staggered to its feet. Instantly, frantic with impatience, the duck rose into the air, crying out hoarsely. She flew on at a tremendous pace about a hundred yards, keeping only a foot or two from the beach, then dropped to earth, staring back. The white stranger, mistaking her impulse, flew past her and went on far ahead before he realised that she was not still with him. Then he turned sullenly back once more.

The oil-draggled figure on the beach began to stumble slowly along, following the flight of the duck. She had not flown directly up the coast, but slightly inland. After a few struggles and a fall, he got off the beach into coarse and sedgy grass that bordered the forest, and began to drag himself painfully through it.

The first slanting rays of morning sunshine comfortingly touched his back. He looked foul and staggering, his feathers blackened with oil stuck to him, and his wings draggled. Some instinct guided him through the taller sedgy grasses whose roughness began to rub tiny smears of oil off him as he struggled along.

The duck rose ahead, then came swooping back to look for him. Finding him walking northward, she swept off another fifty yards or so, alighted, immediately took to wing again and returned to look for him once more.

The sun rose up the sky, promising a glorious day. The sea sparkled. The woods, bare of leaves, seemed to suck strength out of earth and air. Dragging along, almost walking in his sleep, the pintail drake lurched through the thick grass. Sometimes he stopped and shrank down against the earth for a while, and would have slept or died, but the duck came wheeling about his head, urging him to walk northwards. He had long forgotten the northern desire, but she burned with it for them both.

The sun climbed to the zenith and began to descend. Still, the crippled drake was lurching and stumbling northward, knocking

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himself constantly on roots and branches he was too blind with fatigue to see, staggering into stones, lying collapsed, then getting up and standing swaying, and falling onwards again. All the time, the bending grasses scraped with their tiny strength at the oil on his wings and sides and chest.

In the afternoon, they came to a narrow river gurgling down into the sea.

The crippled drake sank down looking at it, and not all the circling and crying and enticing seemed able to make him go any farther. Twice he walked up to the brim, then turned terrified away. At last, towards evening, he woke from a long torpor, and saw the white mallard and the little duck riding on the water closely side by side. The picture roused him, and he surged clumsily down and pushed off towards them before realizing his own crippled state.

He found he could float, tried to lift his wings and failed. But the water was no longer deathly cold, as it had been a few hours before. It was as water always had been to him, gentle and buoyant, welcoming him and bearing him as lightly as a leaf on its gentle undulations.

Wearily, he drank, then wildly. He felt stronger. He plucked up some juicy weeds and ate as if he never could stop. Presently, satisfied, he stared round, remembering what had brought him on to the water. The other two were sailing in the middle of the sluggish river, slowly making their way towards a protected pool half encircled by a curve of bank. Again he prepared to fly, but his wings would not properly lift. So he paddled quietly after the others, even his anger quite worn out. He merely sought a place where, with at least some safety and companionship, he might collapse into the sleep so needful, now, that he no longer cared even if death itself stepped pad-footed from the bushy bank.

No night had ever seemed so long. After hours in a coma of exhaustion that was not unconsciousness but more like a sleeping delirium of aches and fidgetings and horrors, he suddenly awoke. The moon was full and all the world enchanted. Silver trees curved through black shadows over a coldly silver stream. A mouse, stirring the leaves, vanished with a fairy sound.

The white mallard sailed asleep in full view. The little speckled duck was nowhere to be seen. Jerking into startled alertness, the drake detected her, also sleeping, prudently camouflaged to almost utter invisibility within a great blotch of tree shadow on the water, as he was himself. Once more his anger was roused against the stranger, whose choice of a sleeping-place out in full

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view transgressed the first and great law of the wild, where danger for one is almost always danger for all.

The drake suddenly felt chilled through and through. He was stiff with cold, the piercing cold of yesterday that had so nearly ended his life before he could swim ashore, that unnatural cold caused by oily and no longer insulating down. Painfully, he began to swim to the bank, peering this way and that for prowlers of the night. In the shallows he hesitated, afraid. But the cold was mortal, and he had to take the lesser risk. He waded stiffly out of the water and squatted in the shelter of a tiny cavern, exactly his own size, under the arching root of a tree. He was still only a couple of yards from the water, in case danger threatened.

The warmth of his body soon made the touch of the rooted wood and soft earth very snug. Comfort flowed through him, but he could not sleep. At intervals he dozed, then awoke feeling that dangers were all about him. Somewhere towards morning, he jerked into consciousness and immediately shrank closer and smaller into his hole. For where, before, he had faced a clear, rough escarpment to the river's edge, there was now silhouetted the silent shape of an old badger, massive and menacing as a small bear. He was delicately and sensitively smelling the air.

The badger's rank scent blew in little gusts to the crouching drake, whose instinct warned him not to move a feather from that fortunate position downwind of the huge hunter. The great figure stood there, solid and coarse and hairy, the white stripe down his black face silvered in the silent moonlight, looking out across the water to where the two sleeping ducks floated.

He stood for a minute watching the sleeping birds and looking at the eddies of the stream to see whether they might bring his prey nearer the bank. Then he shuffled round and passed so close that the crouching drake could hear the hairy giant breathing. Then he melted almost noiselessly away between the trees, searching for insects and small, unwary animals of the night.

The drake lay a long while after the last whisper of sound had died away. Then he relaxed from his cramped crouch and waited for the dark hours to pass. He was too nervous to sleep again. When the outlines of the trees, darkening and sharpening, told of the coming of morning, he crept out and walked to the water.

He wanted to fly but was afraid to fly. Suddenly, with a choking cry, he jumped into the air. His wings seemed to tear themselves out by the roots, he staggered, almost hit the water, then found himself flying, shot through with cramping pains, but beating his way up and up towards the paling stars. Joy possessed him. He opened his beak and uttered strangulated sounds. He went on

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climbing to a tremendous height, exulting in the movements.

Under him, he saw the other two swiftly rising with twice his speed. The little brown-mottled duck sped straight up beneath him, leaned over so late that he was already turning to avoid collision, and her wings clashed light as a kiss under his as she sped away, the white stranger violently following her. That touch spurred the pintail drake to the depths of his consciousness and sent him speeding after her, for it was the first touch of mating play he had ever experienced.

At this attempt at flying speed, his tired wings almost failed him; he seemed to slip in mid air, whirled sideways, recovered by some miraculous scramble, then hit the water a clumsy splash, and went sailing on into the shallows.

He was completely exhausted for a few moments, too tired even to feed. Perhaps the gods of the wild woods took pity on him; for as he came to a stop, he saw the pathetic sleek body of a drowned mouse slowly turning round and round in the current just ahead. Incontinently, he dived at it and swallowed it down. The meat revived him.

This river was profuse with succulent weeds, and the drake ate and drank with increasing vigour. Then he set to work to tidy himself, working tirelessly to preen his soiled feathers, growing warmed, and feeling the strength from his night's rest filling him with new life.

When the three birds presently rose together and turned northwards in the air, the drake had almost completely recovered, and was flying with graceful ease to lessen as much as possible the strain of the journey ahead.

There was now no sign of enmity or attraction between any of them. They flew in casual comradeship with an unconscious and indifferent beauty, small and austere in the immensity of the pale sky.

* * *

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AFFAIRE DE COEUR

O what a heaven is love! O what a hell!

MIDDLETON AND DEKKER, *The Honest Whore*

Thou sufferest, thou my dearest love. I have just found out that the letters must be posted very early Mondays, Thursdays—the only days when the post goes out from here to K. Thou sufferest—Ah! where I am, art thou also with me; I will arrange for myself and Thee. I will manage so that I can live with Thee; and what a life!!! But as it is!!! without thee.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN, *in a letter to his "Immortal Beloved"*

Definition

Yet what is Love, I prithee, say?
It is a work on holiday . . .

SIR WALTER RALEIGH

Ali-Nur's Sweet Friend

Now the wazir al-Fadl ibn Kahkan had a son so handsome that people beholding him thought that the moon was rising . . .

This young man, whose name was Ali-Nur, knew nothing of the purchase of Sweet-Friend. But the wazir his father had most strictly recommended this precept to the girl: "Know, dear child, that I have bought you for our master, Muhammad ibn Sulaiman; therefore guard yourself well and avoid any occasion on which you, and consequently I, might be compromised. I have a son who is a very handsome fellow but somewhat of a rascal . . . Avoid any meeting with him, let him not hear your voice or see your face; otherwise you will be lost . . ."

A few days later Sweet-Friend went to her bath in the wazir's palace, and all the little slaves set themselves to give her such a bath as they had never achieved in their lives before . . . Then they threw a large towel, scented with orange-flowers and roses, over her body and, wrapping all her hair in a warm cloth, led her to her own apartment, where the wazir's wife waited . . .

The old lady herself wished to take a bath, but, before leaving for this purpose, she commanded two of the little slaves to guard the door of Sweet-Friend's apartment, and to allow no one in on any pretext whatever, since, as she said, Sweet-Friend was quite naked and might catch cold . . .

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Hardly had she left when young Ali-Nur entered the house . . . Astonished to find the door guarded by the two little slaves, who smiled at him because they secretly loved him, he asked if his mother was within. They answered, trying to push him back with their little hands: "Oh no, oh no, our mistress is not here, she is not here!" "Then what are you doing here, my lambs? Come away from the door that I may go in and rest," said Ali-Nur. But the little ones answered: "You cannot come in, Ali-Nur, you cannot come in! Our young mistress, Sweet-Friend, is inside . . . She has just come from the bath and is quite naked. She only has on a big towel. You cannot come in, you cannot come in, Ali-Nur. She will take cold and our mistress will beat us. You cannot come in, Ali-Nur!"

All this time Sweet-Friend, who had heard what was being said outside her room, was thinking: "This must be young Ali-Nur . . ." Unable to contain herself, she rose to her feet, all scented from the bath, her happy body bare to the joy of life, and, slightly opening the door, looked out. She saw Ali-Nur as if the stars were just beyond her door; from that one look she reaped a thousand joys and sorrows. And Ali-Nur also took one glance through that little space, and the sight remained with him for ever . . .

Ali-Nur entered and bowed to her with his hand on his heart, saying tenderly: "Sweet-Friend . . . you are more beautiful than molten gold . . . your naked breast is sweeter and cooler than the foam of streams . . ."

Ali-Nur threw himself on the couch by Sweet-Friend's side, drunken for very joy, and they gripped each other. The little slaves were astonished . . .

The Tale of Sweet-Friend and Ali-Nur,
translated by E. POWYS MATHERS

Tryst

The morning glory climbs above my head,
Pale flowers of white and purple, blue and red.
I am disquieted.

Down in the withered grasses something stirred;
I thought it was his footfall that I heard.
Then a grasshopper chirred.

I climbed the hill just as the new moon showed,
I saw him coming on the southern road.
My heart lays down its load.

From the Chinese, 12th Century B.C.,
translated by HELEN WADDELL

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Mightyly Amazed

I know not too if you have heard of Harry Savile's adventure at Althorp. He being there with Will Russell, my Lady Northumberland, Lady Ashley and others, one night when all were abed he comes up to Lady Northumberland's chamber and, finding her door open, goes in and up to her bedside in his nightgown; and, when he is there, calls "Madam! Madam!" till he wakens her, and says that he came to acquaint her with a passion he had long had, in the dark, which he durst not own to her in the light. She, being mightily amazed to hear his voice, rung a bell by her bedside . . . He begged her not to discover him, and so went away . . .

H.S. since has withdrawn himself, ashamed.

SIR CHARLES LYTTELTON, *in a letter*, 1671.

Paradise Enow

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with teares,
Hither I come to seeke the spring,
And at mine eyes, and at mine eares,
Receive such balmes, as else cure every thing;
But O, selfe traytor, I do bring
The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
And can convert Manna to gall,
And that this place may thoroughly be thought
True Paradise, I have the serpent brought . . .

JOHN DONNE, *Twicknam Garden*

O Vanity

Hath not every man in his degree had his Omphale and Delilah? Mine befooled me on the banks of the Thames, and in dear old England . . . To please that woman, then, I tried to distinguish myself as a soldier, and afterwards as a wit and a politician. And I say I think the world is like Captain Esmond's company I spoke of anon; and could you see every man's career in life, you would find a woman dogging him; or clinging round his march and stopping him; or cheering him and goading him; or beckoning him out of her chariot so that he goes up to her, and leaves the race to be run without him; or bringing him the apple, and saying "Eat"; or fetching him the daggers and whispering "Kill! yonder lies Duncan and a crown, and an opportunity."

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

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STORY AT BEDTIME

In the day it was easy to laugh at these things . . .

by DOROTHY K. HAYNES

THE witch lay long in the mornings, drowsing and mumbling till the sun was well up; but at night, wakeful, she called her children, and made them leave their play to listen.

There was a horror on them as they obeyed her. Reluctance clutched at their ankles and stiffened their knees, so that they could not squat. But soon, with their mother's black skirts tented above their heads, and her hands heavy on their shoulders, they grew absorbed in her story. She spoke about curious things, voyages in cold air, journeys under the moon, and the harry and chase of hunted animals. It was painful to listen, though they did not know why. The idea of it was worse than the reality, the dread like the slow drag of a broken limb. When it was all over, the children never spoke of it, but they clung together tightly in the night.

They never saw their mother going out. Hand in hand under the blankets, they heard the tick and settle of embers, the squeak of a mouse in the wainscot, and the deep bellows-breathing of the woman in the other bed. Their own breath was soft and furtive, a rustle quickly stifled. "Are you awake?" one hand would signal, and the nails and fingers would answer back. It did not matter so long as they slept or woke together. The terror would come if one were to wake alone, and hear the scuffle of their mother getting ready to leave them; or to see the window lit with the moon, and, between it and the bed, the rearing shape of a woman become infernal.

In the day, it was easy to laugh at these things. They did not believe the stories then. They knew that their mother was only an old woman who did odd favours for the neighbours, when they paid her well enough. The stories were only bedtime stories, told out of kindness. All children like a story at bedtime but there was a compulsion, a frightening fascination about these. The fear began in the afternoon, and went on increasing till the dreadful moment when they were called to her knee. The beginning

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and end of the stories were the worst; the climax found them anaesthetized to horror.

The girl stood quite still, her eyes on the coloured tray above the mantelshelf. Her brother was playing with a ball, throwing it and catching it; bounce, bounce against the wall. The dun plaster rang with the thud of it, as he counted up and up, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, a *hundred.*

She was playing with a piece of string, a short, thick piece she had picked up and knotted. The knots had taken her a long time to perfect, twisting one end round and over the other, pulling it tight and tying it again. Hidden in her pocket, her hands caressed the tow, as she looked at the tray.

The enamel in one corner was chipped. Staring at it till she felt dizzy, she thought the chip looked like a gull flying. Suddenly, without knowing why, she untied one of the knots in her string. The gull flew heavily, staggering and dipping. The girl woke to herself only when her mother took the string out of her hand. No word passed between them, no rebuke, no recognition of what had happened. The boy's ball struck the tray and knocked it askew as he ran to the window, where the trees were lashing and bending with the force of a gale that was already past. A chimney pot lay in the garden, smashed, and the flowers were flat and desolate. The girl said nothing. For a moment, she had seen the world as something small and insignificant. Houses, towns and rivers were markings on a map, people mere specks. She almost laughed at her brother's puny excitement over the wind. She and her mother were the only people with any stature at all.

After that, she knew that the evening stories were true. They did not frighten her now. The thrill with which she listened was a thrill of anticipation. In bed, she answered her brother's signals with the same faithful pressure, and dropped into sleep without hearing sound or sign from her mother. She knew that soon the time would come when she would know more.

"Are you awake?"

"Yes." Her fingers pressed a reply. On the pillow beside her, her brother's head tilted sideways, and his eyes rolled backwards into sleep. Outside, the moon was as bright as morning.

She laughed as she left the bed. Already her mother had gone. The old face was still and haggard on the pillow, the bed-clothes hummocked over her knees. She looked at her own bed, and saw herself, seemingly asleep, a protecting hand over her brother's chest. She laughed again. Her power came to her unasked, effortlessly. She had never done this before, but she knew well what

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she would have to do. A witch is not always a witch by choice; a poor soul cannot always help herself; but there is delight in obeying one's nature, and if Nature is evil, who is to blame? Who suffers? Damnation is a long way off, its threat incomprehensible when life is full. The moon is bright, hurry.

Her thin legs, straight as tallow candles, dangled over the edge of the broomstick. There was no movement in the air, no beat of bat or bird wing. She was alone, moving more quietly than an arrow. The earth went dark except where the rivers ran like steel veins, and ponds lay under the moon like clots of mercury. Poised in emptiness, she knew neither speed nor motion.

There is neither beginning nor end to such journeys. She understood now the inconsequential jumps of her mother's narratives—"There was a hall, and we ate food, and drank wine, while those things that I whispered to you about were going on outside . . . and then the cowshed, and everything quiet, with Babsy, the bonny hare, sucking the cow dry, squeezing the udder like a sponge . . ." She understood now. There was no surprise, no query as to direction or destination. She would know the place when she came to it.

Rocks rose sheer and black from the water. High above her the moon canted to one side, and great green rays swept down like sun in a cathedral. Here now was the horror of her mother's stories, the sense of dread, the trilling of every nerve in a bleak nightmare. And here, too, was her mother, sailing by in an egg-shell, beckoning like a black spider scrabbling on the wall.

Inside the shell it was as cold as marble. Quiet, not talking, they drifted under the black hang of the cliff. The open sea beyond shone like a bright rod, but here the water was as smooth and dark as the bottom of a bottle. The shadows shifted as they waited, and the moon lit up fresh chasms in the rock, shining on slaty ledges where seabirds huddled in hundreds. Then a ship came sailing over the silver rod of the surf, into the quietness of the crag-ringed pool.

The witch took a piece of string from her pocket. She untied one knot. A wind got up, and ruffled the wings of the gulls. The ship bounded and lunged, and the waves of the pool slapped new tidemarks on the crags. She untied a second knot. The gale howled, the air chilled to ice, and all the seabirds rose and screamed in wild discord. She untied the third knot. The din in the air was like the yelling of demons. The water boiled white with foam, and under the black base of the cliff, the egg-shell heaved and splintered. There was a horrid grinding, a cry above the roar of wind and storm, and the ship went down, plunging and ploughing in the green glare of the moon. The air settled to stillness, the

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birds flew back to their ledges. The egg-shell boat paddled placidly through the bounding swell.

The witch told about it next evening. Crouched at her feet, the children sat entranced. The boy saw it all with a sickly vividness, the ship going howling to the bottom, the waves seething down, down to quietness, the horrible shut-in loneliness of the place. His mouth was open, his hand groped for his sister's.

The girl interrupted in the heat of the tale. "And we came home fast, because soon it would be morning. And when we got into the house—"

"We?" he asked.

"I forgot," she said, and grinned at him.

He grinned back, his lips stiff with bravery, but his grin was only a wavering gap in a mask of doubt. Creeping into bed, under the bizarre map of the patchwork quilt, he questioned her, half frivolous, half pleading.

"You *don't* go out at night, do you? Never?"

"You'd wonder," she said, licking away a smile with a crooked tongue.

"But you don't? Don't tease. Tell me!"

"Silly! You'd feel if I went out."

He looked at her, straight as a taper in her night-gown. She was his sister, and he was safe with her. They snuggled together, hand signalling to hand in the old unspoken language. The fire winked wan in a bed of ashes, the cauldron was cold in a casing of soot. Crumbs had burrowed in the cracks of the floor and the mice who salvaged them left their dirt in the corners.

He woke in the purple dark, long after midnight. The kitchen was full of soft breathing, the sound of women in slumber. Only his own breathing was harsh, as if he had been running from a nightmare. Beside him in the bed, heavy and immovable, the girl lay like a figure of wax. His hand groped over her breast, down her side, till he reached the cold rigidity of her fingers. He fondled them for a long time, wondering why she did not wake, and respond to him; then, while the nightmare caught up with him, he realised that now he was quite alone.

* * *

SAFETY FIRST

The sergeant was explaining some important points to a squad of rookies on the rifle range.

"This new bullet will penetrate two feet of solid wood," he said. "So remember to keep your heads down."

Southern Farmer

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LADIES' NIGHT

"Let the policeman come too," he said, "—he may be needed"

by JOSEPH CARROLL

MATTHEW CLEARY swivelled on his stool in Mulry's Dark Rosaleen Bar and Grill at the sound of a voice familiar enough, but not in these surroundings. He gaped at the man who stood uncomfortably beside him: Packy Kinsella, dressed as he had never been dressed before, except at his wedding some months ago to Matthew's sister Meg. Packy hardly ever went into Mulry's; he rarely drank, and when he did it was the occasion for alerting the entire police force.

"Whatever at all are you got up like that for in the height of an afternoon in the middle of the week? If you'll forgive me as one man to another—and ourselves being related through the holy bonds of matrimony—you look like one of the wax figures in the men's clothing stores on Madison Street. I never thought to see that suit again until we laid you out in it, may it be a far day."

Packy smiled feebly. He was a squarely built man, heavy in waist, pleasant-faced without having Matthew's nobly handsome features. He was of late middle age, a dozen or so years younger than Matthew. It was hard to tell exactly because Matthew's lies about his age were extremely inconsistent. Packy wore a swallow-tailed coat and grey striped trousers; his shirt was snowy and starched, and his tie was gloomily conservative.

"I'll tell you the lengths and breadths of it as soon as I have a drink," Packy said, climbing on to the stool next to Matthew's and pulling his trouser legs up at the knees in that futile gesture intended to preserve the crease.

Mulry, the proprietor, served them drinks as grudgingly as if they were on the house; he was notorious throughout the neighbourhood for his mean disposition, and people crowded his squalid little bar just as they might go to the panther's cage at the zoo, simply to hear him snarl.

Neither Matthew nor Packy had any time for Mulry now, however, and Matthew rudely told him to go away before he got ear-ache from straining to listen to a private conversation. Mulry told him to gas away and be damned, and then went to the other end of the bar. Such exchanges were a commonplace of their

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relationship, and there were no real hard feelings on either side.

Packy had a pull at his drink and said, "I must have only one, Matt, so don't be tempting me to more, there's a dear man. One I must have or I can't go through with it at all. And if I have more than one, the whole of my resolution will drain away on me and I won't go through with it."

"Go through with what, man?" Matthew asked. "Why aren't you working? By rights you should be guiding a Garfield Park L through the hazards of the Loop, like the fearless driver you are, instead of sitting here with your backside bursting out of those clergyman's pants."

"I took the day off," Packy said. "It's a favour I'm doing for Meg."

"Mightn't I have known?" said Matthew, running his hand through his shiny white hair. He had quite approved of his sister's marriage to Packy. He was fond of them both, and their relative ages were suitable, but he had always known that, mentally, Meg was more than a match for Packy.

Meg, who had been a widow for years, was an incorrigible meddler, a compulsive manager of other people's affairs; she was good-humoured and intelligent, but never really happy unless she was goading the idle from key posts on a score of committees. The gentle Packy loved her, though their attraction was like that of Othello and Desdemona in reverse. Meg had all the adventures and Packy did the admiring.

She had never met the anthropophagi or men "whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders," but if she had, she would have criticized the diet of the first group, and the posture of the second, given them some pamphlets on women's rights and sold them tickets for a charity fête.

"Mightn't I have known?" Matthew repeated. "Packy, amn't I telling you many's the time never to promise to do a favour for Meg, fine figure of a woman though she is, until you learn what it is and in the presence of witnesses? Where her committees are concerned, you wouldn't find her like for treachery and cunning in the annals of Dublin Castle.

"Once she inveigled me into being the judge of a baby show at a picnic out in the Forest Preserve. The babies were all gargoyles, and when I picked the least hideous, I barely escaped with my life from the harpies that spawned the others. One of them screamed that I'd been bribed. Bribed indeed. The foul little nipper that won bit me twice with the two teeth he had in his head, and committed unspeakable indignities on my person.

"Another time, owing to the stratagems of Meg, my life was made a living hell by a broomstick of a woman, who kept coming

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to the newspaper office where I work. She used to put flowers on my desk—with the whole city room gazing at her—and leave poetry that would bring a blush to the cheeks of a burlesque queen."

Packy looked up, interested. "Do you tell me, Matt? A poet? It's one of them Meg is sending me after now."

Matthew turned to him gravely. "If it's the same one, Packy, take it from me—better a quick, merciful death by leaping into the river from the Link Bridge. What's her name?"

"It's a man. Name of Cathal Breffny. I'm to meet him at the LaSalle Street Station very soon."

"I never heard of him," Matthew said. "He must be a minor poet. What's he to do with Meg?"

Packy sighed. "He's to be the guest of honour at a *brannigan* the Daughters of Innisfail are throwing tonight over at a hotel near Columbus Park. He's to read them his poems and tell them about poetry, and afterwards there'll be eating and drinking."

"Drinking?"

Packy shook his head. "Nothing you'd care about Matt. Punch."

Matthew quivered. "I know the kind. Bits of orange peel and assorted refuse floating on top. What's all this to do with you? You're not a Daughter of Innisfail?"

"I'm telling you," Packy said. "I've to meet this poet at the station. Meg has a committee meeting, so I'm to stay with this fellow till it's time for the shindy tonight. Whatever am I to say to him?"

"You won't need to say much," Matthew said. "Poets are devils to talk, mostly about themselves."

Packy said dejectedly: "Meg wants me to talk with him, ask him questions. She says I'm not very poetic. The only poem I know is *The Deserted Village*, which I was forced once to learn at school, because of some piece of misbehaviour. I don't even remember much of that any more, except when I've a drop in me, and then I'm likely to stand on tables and recite it."

"I never heard you," Matthew said.

"Then you're the lucky one. Mostly it's hard to stop me, and it's a terrible long poem."

He stood up. "It's time for me to go, Matt. I wouldn't want this poor *streeshabaun* standing in the wilderness of a railway station, being knocked down by a horde of suburban types bound for home, and himself without a friendly face to turn to."

"How will you know him? There's no certain way of telling a poet by the looks of him. In these times, a poet might look like a stockbroker or an insurance salesman. Will this lad be wearing a bay wreath?"

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" His name will be on his suit-case," Packy said, " and I'm to meet him at the information office. Would you come with me, Matt? You know all about poetry, or so you're forever telling everybody."

" I can't," said Matthew. " I'm here to meet Denny Lynch. He has something on his mind, for he phoned saying he had to see me. But I'll likely as not see you tonight, Packy: I've a great curiosity to see the Daughters of Innisfail in action with a live poet."

Packy went sombrely on his way.

Some time later, Denny Lynch arrived and greeted Matthew listlessly. " It's the women of the Cleary family that keep their husbands frisking like kittens for the sheer joy of living," said Matthew. " First Packy, and now you. What the hell is ailing you? "

Denny was married to Matthew's daughter and only child, Imelda. They were a splendid couple, Matthew had always thought, for all that Denny had the body of an overtrained wrestler, and Imelda was a slight girl, dark and pretty.

" Ask your daughter what's ailing me," Denny said. " It would take her hours to tell you. I think she keeps a list so she won't forget any little flaw or shortcoming."

" Bitter, Denny, bitter," Matthew said. " Is it some trifle of a family quarrel? The gravy was lumpy, maybe, and you told her it was like eating wet flannel. These things happen—"

Denny made a choking noise. Matthew hit him on the back and asked: " Drink go down the wrong way? "

" Stop beating me," Denny said irritably. " I've taken all I can from the Cleary family."

" Do you mean to tell me Imelda raised her hand to you? " Matthew said. " I'd not have thought it. A tongue like a scythe, yes, when the bad mood is on her, but open violence—"

" Oh, shut up, Matt," Denny said, " and let me tell you. She was sweet as anything up till the day before yesterday. I don't know what I did or didn't do, but there's no pleasing her now. She looks at me as if I were an oaf and a fat-head. She practically says I am, when she says anything at all. She told me I have no poetry in me."

" You too? " Matthew said. " Whatever is coming over these women? I never knew either Meg or Imelda to pass the time learning poetry by heart. Meg's more likely to be out suborning chairmen to make rulings in her favour, and Imelda to be home trying out a new recipe. And now both of them are carrying on like they were Phoebe Cary or Adelaide Crapsey."

He told Denny about Packy's ordeal.

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"Poor Packy," Denny said. "I have to go to that thing tonight too, Matt—with Imelda, though I wonder she'll let me take her. This Cathal What's-his-name is one of her favourites. She says he has elfin qualities that of course will be lost on me."

"Much she knows about elfin qualities," Matthew said. "Small danger she'll go wandering palely in the Celtic Twilight, living on dreams. Not with *her* appetite. She makes a god of her stomach, and I've seen her put away meals a hard-working lorry driver like yourself would find hard to manage."

"Now, wait a minute, Matt," Denny said indignantly. "Stick to the subject. Why shouldn't she enjoy her food? I like to see her eat, she's such a little thing."

Matthew looked at him pleasantly. "I make the most innocent remark about the girl's grosser habits, and you begin raging at me. Am I to take it that you're not thinking of breaking your home and going for a soldier?"

"You know damn' well I'm not," Denny said emphatically. "I didn't mean to be bitter. The girl's probably right: she's too sensitive for a clod like me. But my opportunities are so limited, Matt. I drive that lorry by day, and at night I study law. Did you ever try to get poetry out of a tort or an escheat, Matt? I thought you could help me out. You're always going on about your own poetic nature."

Matthew turned on him imperiously. "Going on about it? Now I come to think of it, that's almost the same thing Packy implied. Let me tell you, my lad—"

The telephone had been ringing, and Mulry called grouchily: "It's for you Matt."

Matthew went to the phone. A voice roared into the receiver: "Is that you, Matt? It's me—Packy."

Matthew winced. "Stand back and lower your voice, Packy. You're an insult to the memory of Alexander Graham Bell. What the hell's the matter?"

"I need your help, Matt," Packy yelled. "I can't handle this poet all by myself. Sure, I never knew poets were like this."

"Like what?"

"Like this one. He was capering like a goat when I met him at the train, and the goats won't be in it with him if he keeps up toe way he's going now. Matt, I've lived among rough and uncouth characters in my time, but I never heard the like of this one for coarseness."

"Where are you?"

"We're in a place on the Near North Side, but we won't be for long. I think the manager has sent for the police. This dreadful poet has lined up all the waitresses and is teaching them what he

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says is an Irish dance, though I never saw an Irish dance like that before.

"He has just been singing a song about how the French are peculiar because they call their daughters fillies and their mothers mares. The manager is French and he challenged Cathal to a duel."

"Did he accept?" Matthew asked, fascinated.

"No. He says duelling is contrary to the teachings of his religion. But he offered to fight bare-fisted, anywhere and any time, the silly little bantam."

"Is he little?"

"He looks like the *pooka*," Packy said. "You know, the little sprite that goes around curdling milk. If he took his hat off—and he ought to, wait till you see it, Matt—he could run under a low table and never shift a hair."

Matthew had already made up his mind, even without these allurements.

"Where is this place?" he asked, and when Packy told him he said: "Stay where you are. Denny Lynch is with me, and he has a vested interest in this poet too. We'll be there in no time. If the police come, tell them I'm on my way. They all know me as a prominent newspaper-man, or at least as an unbeatable poker player—I have IOUs from half the Force."

He hung up and called to Denny as he strode towards the door: "Come on now, Denny. There's man's work to be done."

Denny followed him to the street. "Where are we going, Matt?"

Matthew hailed a taxi and they climbed in. "You want to find out about poetry, don't you?" Matthew answered. "This is your chance. Packy has a live poet by the tail, and we're on our way to rescue him."

"The poet?"

"Certainly not. Packy."

They found the Near North Side restaurant easily, but in it nothing like the scene of carnage Matthew had been prepared for. The only rowdiness seemed to be coming from Packy, who rose unsteadily from his chair at a table right at the back and shouted: "Come on now, Matt, and join us. Denny, you're welcome, but it's Matt we're waiting for—he having the devil's own memory for words. It's a song I'm trying to think of, Matt, and the words are gone from me entirely." He hummed hoarsely. "You know the one I mean: *Mrs. Mulligan the Pride of the Coombe.*"

Matthew looked at him closely, and then at the rest of the party. A husky young policeman sat at one end of the table, wearing

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his hat pushed back and smiling a rather foolish smile. At the other end of the table sat a large man with magnificent moustaches, whom Matthew rightly took to be the manager. And seated between them was a figure that could only be Cathal Breffny, the poet.

All three rose to shake hands when Packy made the introductions.

"Ah," said Cathal Breffny, "this is an exquisite pleasure that the dashing Packy there has been holding before us with a generous eloquence that must have had your ears burning red fire. Sit down now, Matt, and that snowy-breasted pearl yonder will bring you and Denny a drink."

Matthew glanced at the giggling waitress, who went for the the drinks. Matthew turned again to examine Cathal.

He was an odd little customer, with hair the colour and lustre of gingerbread; his body was skinny in tweedy clothes of an outrageous pattern; his face was engagingly ugly, and his bright eyes had a clever look.

"I had it in mind you said trouble was stirring," Matthew said to Packy.

"Trouble?" said Packy as though he had never heard of it. "Sure, there's no trouble at all, Matt. Cathal straightened everything out. The officer there did come in some such anticipation, it's true, but he arrived to the very cooing of doves. And as he was going off duty anyway, he agreed to join us in a drink."

The policeman grinned at Matthew and tilted his glass.

"You see, Matt," Cathal said, rising like a toast-master, "our host there"—he nodded toward the proprietor—"thought I intended a slur on the nation of his birth by a little song I sang, and in the heat of the drink high words passed between us. But as my native wisdom asserted itself over my quick temper, I realized that the dispute need never go so far as the United Nations."

Packy, who had got himself another drink, tossed it off and said: "Hear, hear!" The proprietor beamed internationally.

"Now then," Cathal continued, pointing at Matthew, "can it be gainsaid that the Irish and the French have bonds of friendship forged in the very smithy of history?"

"It cannot," Matthew said. He was already fond of Cathal Breffny, recognizing in him a fellow spellbinder and self-hypnotizer.

"It cannot," said Cathal, "and so I told this honest native of fair France. I told him of the Wild Geese that went from Ireland to France in the seventeenth century."

"I didn't understand that part of it," the policeman said suddenly. "Didn't they have any geese of their own?"

Cathal leaned towards him majestically, or as nearly so as his stature allowed. "Officer," he said, "you should spend less time harassing society's unhappy outcasts and more in reading

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the history of the country of your forbears. It's a figure, a metaphor."

The policeman looked as though that only made it worse.

"The Wild Geese were soldiers and patriots who fled from the tyranny that oppressed Ireland and took refuge on the Continent. Some of the bravest fought in the armies of France—"

Denny decided to interrupt. Like Matthew, he was pleased by Cathal Breffny, but he was damned if he was going to sit still for a course in Irish history, however abridged.

Not for nothing was Denny the son-in-law of Matthew Cleary. "I think we all need another drink," Denny said, picking the very topic most likely to choke off a harangue; from the look of him, Denny thought it would take only one more drink to make Cathal Breffny forget not only the wrongs of Ireland but quite probably his own name.

Cathal turned to Denny approvingly. "Now, here's a man with a head on his shoulders," he said. "Another drink he's calling for, and a wiser word never was spoken, not by the sages of old, or the druids, or the prophets."

The proprietor by this time was far gone in good will and his own wares; with a generous flailing of arms and a burst of language that raped English idiom with every word, he made it plain that this one was on him, that, in fact, the sky was the limit and their money was no good in his establishment.

All the others gestured back, and, in French even weirder than the proprietor's English, Matthew said that of course they would accept a drink. When his skimpy French—and it was even skimpier than his Gaelic—ran out, he resorted to the English of the stage Frenchman. "We—how shall I say?—we are not insensible to—what is it, the word?—the munificence—"

"What he means," Denny told the proprietor, "is that we aren't throwing anything over our shoulders."

Matthew at first scowled and then went back into his act. "So well you explain it, my old: over our shoulders nothing are we throwing."

And so for hours they threw nothing over their shoulders.

The time for the meeting of the Daughters of Innisfail was drawing near. Packy clearly had forgotten his responsibilities and was reciting *The Deserted Village* to a waitress; he had to recite very loud to make himself heard over the juke box, into which Denny kept putting coins in order to hear *Galway Bay* over and over again.

Matthew saw that it was up to him. "Cathal," he said, "we must be off. The Daughters of Innisfail will be waiting for you to

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edify them with the music of your voice and the sweetness of your understanding of poetry."

Cathal had drowsed off, but he bestirred himself and said, "True for you. I'd be charmed to meet your daughters any time, and—I being a man punctilious in the decencies—you could trust me with them anywhere."

"Only one of them is mine. The rest are Daughters of Innisfail—about a hundred of them in all."

The policeman whistled. "A hundred! Is this Innisfail a friend of yours?" The policeman had been drowsing too.

Matthew smiled uncharitably. "Now is the time to meet him. I've known him for years. Let us all go together."

Galway Bay died out, and Denny heard Matthew's proposal; Packy's memory had flagged somewhere in the middle of *The Deserted Village* and he heard it too. They both expressed enthusiastic approval.

"You see, Cathal," Matthew said, "there's an idea at large among some of these Daughters that there is a dearth of poetry among their men. It doesn't apply to me, of course, for no woman—not one as brazen as my sister Meg or as eaten up with conceit as my daughter Imelda—would be bold-faced enough to deny my learning in poetry. But there's more than a little feeling that Packy here is a poor earthbound *bosthoon*—"

Packy, warmed by Goldsmith's lines, looked indignant.

"—and that Denny, though a man with formidable biceps, knows nothing about poetry except that sometimes the lines sound the same at the end."

Denny looked indignant too; he remembered that he had been deeply moved by *Galway Bay* all twenty times he had played it.

Cathal's drowsiness was all gone. He was interested by the challenge of Matthew's words, and was all on the side of Denny and Packy. "Let the policeman come too," he said. "He may be needed to keep the peace."

The copper, in a condition of parboiled amiability, moved his hand vaguely in a gesture of assent, as though he were waving a motorist over a cross-roads. The proprietor, who had with belated prudence changed his drink to black coffee, refused their invitation on the grounds that he must stay to make the evening trade feel at home.

"Let's be on our way, then," Cathal said. "These ladies of intellect will be given such an evening that I've more than half a mind to put up my price."

At the hotel near Columbus Park, Meg Cleary Garvey Kinsella—

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who had acquired her surnames in that order—stood at the entrance to the Tara Room, graciously greeting the incoming Daughters of Innisfail, who were out to pay homage to literature if it killed them; the husbands and swains they drove before them had the gloomy faces of men who were certain that it would do exactly that.

Imelda Lynch stood next to her aunt and watched the door from the street, half anxiously, half impatiently. "Denny should be here by now, Meg," she said. And then she added with bitterness: "If he's coming at all. The very thought of poetry may have frightened him away."

Meg said, "I hope it hasn't frightened Packy, for the guest of the evening is in his keeping. They should be here too—it's only a few minutes till starting time. I hope Packy is learning something from the conversation of a genuinely sensitive man like Cathal Breffny. Packy has splendid qualities, but—"

She stopped, startled by the look on Imelda's face, a look of astonishment.

Meg turned in the direction in which Imelda was staring. Across the lobby a tipsy procession was approaching, Indian file, led by Matthew, with Denny towering at the rear.

"Are they being arrested, Meg?" Imelda asked.

"Not by the looks of that policeman. In his condition he couldn't arrest a truant from the fourth form. Wouldn't you know Matt would be with them? My poor Packy has obviously been sniffing corks—that's all it takes with him. Dear girl, we're in for a time of it."

Imelda nodded, numbly.

"The little fellow must be Cathal Breffny," Meg continued, "and I must say I expected something different, considering the price we're paying. I hope he *talks* well."

The procession arrived, and Matthew greeted Meg with shameless self-assurance.

"You'll have poetry and to spare before this evening is over, my high-chested sibling and friend of the arts," he said in the posh accents of a stage juvenile.

Meg's reserves of poise were fathomless, and she held out a queenly hand to Cathal. "Ah, Mr. Breffny," she said, "I cannot tell you how deeply honoured we are to have you with us."

She had said the same thing to hundreds of guests of honour, and there was lots more to the speech; but Cathal squinted at her so impudently that Meg was almost disconcerted and broke off.

Cathal removed his extraordinary pie-shaped hat and took her hand courteously. "I should like you to meet a dear friend of mine," he said. "A man of remarkable intellect, with the most profound poetic insights. Mr. Packy Kinsella."

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He threw an arm round Packy's shoulders, standing on tiptoe in order to accomplish this.

"Mr. Kinsella and I," said Meg, "are already acquainted."

Packy, grinning foolishly, lunged at her as though she were one of the Sabine women, and flung his arms round her waist. "*Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain, Where health and plenty cheer'd the labouring swain,*" said Packy, who was the best friend Oliver Goldsmith ever had.

Meg, whose dignity was often in danger of being betrayed by her humour, choked back a giggle.

"Pull yourself together, for Heaven's sake, Packy," she said. "People are looking."

And so they were, staring intently. Some of the men were beginning to feel that the evening might not be such a bore after all.

"*Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid, And parting summer's lingering blooms delay'd,*" Packy went on, still clasping Meg ardently.

Cathal Breffny and Matthew looked on with delight, but Matthew said: "Not all of it, Packy: we've a full evening ahead of us."

Meg, without actually struggling, managed to break away from Packy's grip.

"It's well past time for the meeting to begin, Mr. Breffny," she said, "and people will be getting impatient. If you're quite ready, I'll lead you to the platform. I'm in the chair you know."

"And well you'll fill it," said Cathal, with a glance at her person. Meg decided to take the kinder meaning of his remark and smiled. "This way, then," she said. He followed her up.

Denny's magnificent glow, meanwhile, had worn off completely. Imelda had taken one look at him and walked away to take a seat right up in front; this had the same effect as black coffee, and Denny disconsolately sat down in a chair in the last row, next to the policeman, whose head was nodding. Matthew sat down with them and nudged the policeman.

"The show's beginning," Matthew said.

The policeman sat upright and yelled, "Take it off!"

Matthew hushed him, but the damage was already done; and Meg, on the platform faced an audience that was having a hard time avoiding laughter. The policeman went back to sleep. Packy's glow was as good as ever, but he kept it in order and sat down quietly and gazed lovingly at his wife up on the platform.

Meg kept her introduction short and simple. The name of Cathal Breffny, she indicated, was too well known to make it necessary for her to elaborate on his achievements in the world of poetry. Hardly anyone in the audience had ever heard of him before, but Meg's platitudes gave them no sense of inferiority:

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they had listened to too many introductions of speakers who were well known to everybody but themselves.

Meg stepped away from the lectern, and Cathal approached it. This was disastrous to the solemnity of the occasion, for Cathal's gingery head barely rose above the lectern; and again there was the restlessness of laughter held back.

Cathal was incapable of being abashed by any kind of laughter; he stepped from behind the lectern and, seizing a chair, drew it up to the very edge of the platform and sat down cosily.

"I like to see the people I'm talking to," he said, and now there was no need to hold back the laughter. The audience—at least the male half of it—was beginning to take Cathal to its heart.

"D'ye know," he said, as intimately as if he were chatting with a friend in a bar, "I've a notion in my head, from what I've heard from some splendid gentlemen I met when I arrived this afternoon, that this evening oughtn't to take quite the course the good ladies of your organization planned.

"It is true surely that I am supposed to be a poet, but d'ye know, people have the damnedest ideas about poets and poetry alike, and I'd be the fool of the world if I were to sit here and connive with an attitude of mind which, it seems to me, gives poetry a black eye with many an honest soul.

"Y'see, I happen to *like* poetry: the written kind, the formal kind, the kind you find in books. But that isn't the only kind of poetry—or better I should say books aren't the only places to look for poetry.

"It finds its way into books in ways you wouldn't expect. My great compatriot, John Millington Synge, once told how he got some of the loveliest lines in one of his plays from listening through the chink of a cottage wall to the conversation of two servant-girls in Wicklow. The girls would have been astonished if anyone had told them they were talking poetry. And that happens all the time to anyone with the ear to hear it.

"Now, I know better than to think that among these ladies of intellect and charm there could be that most pitiable of creatures, a snob. I have it on the word of a distinguished member of your audience, Mr. Matthew Cleary, who is a sound man on everything except perhaps Gaelic. I should hate to ask my way around Connacht with the Gaelic Matt has."

Meg, at the chairman's table, had been looking her most puzzled: a haughty kind of puzzlement. Now, before she could stifle it, a laugh escaped her. It was always pleasant to see Matthew given one in the eye. The other ladies of the audience laughed too, reasoning that they were no more obliged to keep a dignified

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silence than their chairman. Besides, they were warming to Cathal from moment to moment. He had praised their brains and commended himself to their hearts.

At the back of the hall, Matthew first bridled, then smiled, knowing that the poet was using policy, and a very wily policy too, which would have done credit to Matthew himself. It was plain to see that Meg, though still grappling with indignation, was looking more good-natured than she had since the meeting started.

Cathal threw out his arms as though to embrace everyone in the hall and squinted blandishingly.

"But d'ye know, nothing can kill poetry quicker for any man or woman of spirit than to be told that you're *obliged* to like it—in the book way, I mean. And that is what I do hope doesn't happen here. It *won't* happen here, unless someone else is prepared to give a lecture, for I'm not."

The audience leaned forward expectantly. They weren't certain exactly what Cathal had in mind, but it was sure to be interesting.

Cathal went on. "I notice," he said, "having a quick eye for such things, that there is a piano at the back of this hall."

The audience stirred, with a restless turning of heads.

"Now, why," said Cathal, "why shouldn't we push all those undertaker chairs to the walls and dance?"

An instant of silence followed, and then a thunder of applause, led by the men but soon joined in by the women. When it died down, Cathal, who was now standing, said: "If no one else can play the piano, I can, and sing like a thrush on top of it. In the interest of my profession, I won't have it said that a poet ever stood in the way of a good time." He clapped his hands. "Let's be on with it, then. And for gallantry's sake, let the men move the chairs. Put your shoulders to it, boys."

The hall was lively with laughter and the noise of chairs being dragged across the floor. Cathal turned to Meg and said: "Of course, I won't be taking the fee."

She stared at him steadily a moment and then began to laugh, a loud and pleasant laugh. "Indeed you will take your fee, Mr. Breffny," she said, when she could manage to talk. "I'd pay twice the money out of my own pocket to be told so tactfully to stop acting like a fool."

She stood up and extended her hands to Cathal. "I'm going to Packy now," she said. "I never did hear how *The Deserted Village* turns out."

They went down the steps from the platform and Cathal asked: "Tell me now, which of the lovely girls is Imelda?"

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Meg pointed to her niece, stony-faced in a corner of the hall. Cathal skipped swiftly over to the girl and began to talk to her earnestly.

Meg joined Packy, Matthew and Denny at the back of the hall. The policeman was still sleeping in the one chair that had not been moved. Meg smiled at Packy, but held up a hand when he started to make another of his violent lunges.

"Later," she said. "We've all the time in the world."

"Poetry, is it?" said Matthew.

Meg turned to him. "I know it was your doing, Matt. You have your points, charlatan though you are. The punch bowl is over there. And Packy, dear, I do think you've had enough."

Someone was playing the piano, and the floor was crowded with dancers.

Cathal Breffny edged his way along the wall and joined the group at the punch bowl. Of the lot of them, only Denny was looking sad.

"Look here, my lad," said Cathal to Denny, "you are a fine fellow and a handsome one, with the look of one of the fighting heroes out of the old legends. But you are an ass."

Denny lifted his head indignantly.

"Now, don't get into a rage," Cathal said. "I'm telling you this for your own good. Don't you ever read books, you lumbering innocent? Surely you know why your wife is acting the way she is."

Matthew, Meg and Packy leaned towards Cathal expectantly; you never knew about Cathal. Denny's indignation gave way to bewilderment.

"What *is* the matter with Imelda?" he asked. "Did she tell you?"

Cathal nodded smugly. "I'm the lad that can always get the girls to talk. But, Denny, you juggins, you should have guessed. Some women wake up in the night and want olives, or blue cheese, or artichokes or anything else that's not available at the precise moment. Most women want something all the time, when they're in that condition. An eminent psychiatrist, who is a dear friend of mine, explained it all to me once, but I forget the explanation. Anyway, it doesn't matter. Imelda thought she wanted poetry, but she knows better now."

A smile of brilliant happiness was rending Denny's face. Matthew, Meg and Packy also were smiling, especially Matthew.

"What does she want?" Denny asked.

Cathal looked at Matthew and squinted charmingly. "Being the daughter of Matthew Cleary, she wants the moon. Go and give it to her, boy."

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Denny ran.

The music and the vigour of the dancing suddenly woke the policeman, and he made his way uncertainly to the little group round the punch bowl. " Sorry I missed your act, lady," he said to Meg courteously, " but I had a lousy seat and you never can see anything anyway, if there isn't a gangway."

Meg collapsed in laughter. " Packy, my angel," she spluttered, " I believe this is your dance."

They waltzed away, light of foot and light of heart.

" The girl's batty," the policeman said to Cathal and Matthew, but they were too far gone in laughter to manage any speech.

" You're all batty," the policeman said, and then, always the philosopher, helped himself to some punch.

* * *

ANSWERS to HIDDEN HANDS on page 32

1. *Mr. Pickwick's hands (as described by Mr. Winkle in Charles Dickens' " Pickwick Papers ") clasped Mrs. Bardell's waist* (5).
2. *The hand was Alice's. The crash was caused by the White Rabbit falling into the cucumber frame. From " Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll* (4).
3. *The hand was Helen Stoner's in the story " The Adventure of the Speckled Band," by Arthur Conan Doyle. Sherlock Holmes pushed back the frill. Grimesby Roylott had ill-treated her* (5).
4. *Their hands were blue. From " The Jumblies," by Edward Lear* (3).
5. *Captain Wentworth put out his hands. Louisa Musgrove fell on the Cobb at Lyme Regis. From " Persuasion," by Jane Austen* (5).
6. *The right hand belonged to Lemuel Gulliver. He was holding six Lilliputians. From " Gulliver's Travels," by Jonathan Swift* (4).
7. *" Left Hand, Right Hand," by Sir Osbert Sitwell* (2).
8. *Elijah's servant saw " a little cloud . . . like a man's hand." It portended rain. From The Bible, I Kings xviii* (3).

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, Razor-bill. 8, Parliamentary. 11, Tack. 12, Birds. 13, Junk. 16, Bismuth. 17, Heathen. 18, Largess. 20, Refusal. 21, Ties. 22, Blade. 23, Bonn. 26, Infinitesimal. 27, Spokesman.

Down. 2, Able. 3, Obadiah. 4, Breadth. 5, Loth. 6, Lance-sergeant. 7, Draughtswoman. 9, Stability. 10, Skinflint. 14, Fusee. 15, Taffy. 19, Selkirk. 20, Redress. 24, Lisp. 25, Diva.

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Tree Music

AFTER a night of rain, a gale comes roaring out of the north-west, and wind-torn clouds scud over the rim of the mountains and race in a panic across the blue sky. The sun is weak. The sunlight is white; and even at noon the shadows lie deep across the earth. Since the trees are bare, an occasional white birch draws a slim, glaring line that is conspicuous a half mile away. The silvery trunks of the beeches reflect the light gently. The mown fields are greyish yellow; the fields that have just been ploughed are red with moist fertility. Well-watered for the past month the lawn is brilliantly green, and two misguided dandelions are in bloom.

This is the majestic season for the evergreens. Blackish green after the growing season, the Norway spruces look hardy and massive. The red pines glow extravagantly, and the clump of young white pines at the bottom of the pasture now dominates the whole landscape. When the ancient deciduous trees are in leaf, the pine woods look promising. But this is the season of triumph for them. They are the liveliest patches on the hill. Relieved of the summer contrast with old elms and ashes, they look big. They are going to inherit the earth.

They were planted thirteen years ago. In contrast with the disorder of a natural forest they have always looked a little too proper. But now it is plain that they are acquiring a natural disorder of their own. They range in height from three feet to fifteen. They have developed their own groupings; they have left open spots, and the deer have made twisting corridors through their ranks. The pines toss and twist in the gale. But their motion has the grace of a dance, and as the wind sweeps through their long leaves, they make wild music. For this is their season, and they are happy about it.

BROOKS ATKINSON, *Once Around the Sun*

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★ *"It was not until the figure was quite close, within the yellow light of the porch, that they saw clearly what had come." ARGOSY readers will be fascinated by the strange, macabre reality of "The Sad Café." Carson McCullers' story, like the finest modern architecture, is tremendous in line and simplicity—stark, yet told with the alluring power of old romance. Hidden love and latent tenderness grow as naturally from crude action and sordid background as a flower from a blitzed site. This brilliant young American writes with fearless candour and a woman's perceptive vision. Her characters achieve a maturity which is the touchstone of great fiction. Miss Amelia and Cousin Lymon are figures who would have delighted Hardy or Dickens, yet their appeal is essentially to the modern reader. This is a tale you will not be able to put down.*

The First Part of

THE BALLAD OF THE SAD CAFE

by CARSON McCULLERS

THE town itself is dreary; not much is there except the cotton mill, the two-room houses where the workers live, a few peach trees, a church with two coloured windows, and a miserable main street only a hundred yards long.

On Saturdays the tenants from the near-by farms come in for a day of talk and trade. Otherwise the town is lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world. The nearest train stop is Society City, and the Greyhound and White Bus Lines use the Forks Falls Road which is three miles away. The winters here are short and raw, the summers white with glare and fiery hot.

If you walk along the main street on an August afternoon there is nothing whatsoever to do. The largest building, in the very centre of the town, is boarded up completely and leans so far to the right that it seems bound to collapse at any minute.

The house is very old. There is about it a curious, cracked look that is very puzzling until you suddenly realize that at one time, and long ago, the right side of the front porch had been painted, and part of the wall—but the painting was left unfinished and one portion of the house is darker and dingier than the other.

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The building looks completely deserted. Nevertheless, on the second floor there is one window which is not boarded; sometimes in the late afternoon when the heat is at its worst a hand will slowly open the shutter and a face will look down on the town.

It is a face like the terrible dim faces known in dreams—sexless and white, with two grey crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief.

The face lingers at the window for an hour or so, then the shutters are closed once more, and as likely as not there will not be another soul to be seen along the main street. These August afternoons—when your shift is finished there is absolutely nothing to do; you might as well walk down to the Forks Falls Road and listen to the chain gang.

However, here in this very town there was once a café, and this old boarded-up house was unlike any other place for many miles around. There were tables with cloths and paper napkins, coloured streamers from the electric fans, great gatherings on Saturday nights.

The owner of the place was Miss Amelia Evans. But the person most responsible for the success and gaiety of the place was a hunchback called Cousin Lymon.

One other person had a part in the story of this café—he was the former husband of Miss Amelia, a terrible character who returned to the town after a long term in the penitentiary, caused ruin, and then went on his way again. The café has long since been closed, but it is still remembered.

The place was not always a café. Miss Amelia inherited the building from her father, and it was a store that carried mostly feed, guano, and staples such as meal and snuff. Miss Amelia was rich. In addition to the store she operated a still three miles back in the swamp, and ran out the best liquor in the county.

She was a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality. She might have been a handsome woman if, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed.

There were those who would have courted her, but Miss Amelia cared nothing for the love of men and was a solitary person. Her marriage had been unlike any other marriage ever contracted in this county—it was a strange and dangerous marriage, lasting only for ten days, that left the whole town wondering and shocked.

Except for this queer marriage Miss Amelia had lived her life alone. Often she spent whole nights back in her shed in the swamp, dressed in overalls and gum boots, silently guarding the low fire of the still.

With all things which could be made by the hands Miss Amelia prospered. She sold chitterlings and sausage in the town nearby. On fine autumn days she ground sorghum, and the syrup from

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her vats was dark golden and delicately flavoured. She built the brick privy behind her store in only two weeks and was skilled in carpentering.

It was only with people that Miss Amelia was not at ease. People, unless they are nilly-willy or very sick, cannot be taken into the hands and changed overnight to something more worth while and profitable. So that the only use that Miss Amelia had for other people was to make money out of them. And in this she succeeded. Mortgages on crops and property, a saw-mill, money in the bank—she was the richest woman for miles around.

She would have been rich as a congressman if it were not for her one great failing, and that was her passion for lawsuits and the courts. She would involve herself in long and bitter litigation over just a trifle. It was said that if Miss Amelia so much as stumbled over a rock in the road she would glance around instinctively as though looking for something to sue about it.

Apart from these lawsuits she lived a steady life and every day was very much like the day that had gone before. With the exception of her ten-day marriage, nothing happened to change this until the spring of the year that Miss Amelia was thirty years old.

It was toward midnight on a soft quiet evening in April. The sky was the colour of a blue swamp iris, the moon clear and bright. The crops that spring promised well and in the past weeks the mill had run a night shift. Down by the creek the square brick factory was yellow with light, and there was the faint, steady hum of the looms. It was such a night when it is good to hear from far away, across the dark fields, the slow song of a Negro on his way to make love. Or when it is pleasant to sit quietly and pick a guitar, or simply to rest alone and think of nothing at all.

The street that evening was deserted, but Miss Amelia's store was lighted and on the porch outside there were five people. One of these was Stumpy MacPhail, a foreman with a red face and dainty, purplish hands. On the top step were two boys in overalls, the Rainey twins—both of them lanky and slow, with white hair and sleepy green eyes. The other man was Henry Macy, a shy and timid person with gentle manners and nervous ways, who sat on the edge of the bottom step.

Miss Amelia herself stood leaning against the side of the open door, her feet crossed in their big swamp boots, patiently untying knots in a rope she had come across. They had not talked for a long time.

One of the twins, who had been looking down the empty road, was the first to speak. "I see something coming," he said.

"A calf got loose," said his brother.

The approaching figure was still too distant to be clearly seen. The moon made dim, twisted shadows of the blossoming peach trees along the side of the road. In the air the odour of blossoms and sweet spring grass mingled with the warm, sour smell of the near-by lagoon.

"No. It's somebody's young 'un," said Stumpy MacPhail.

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Miss Amelia watched the road in silence. She had put down her rope and was fingering the straps of her overalls with her brown bony hand. She scowled, and a dark lock of hair fell down on her forehead.

While they were waiting there, a dog from one of the houses down the road began a wild, hoarse howl that continued until a voice called out and hushed him.

It was not until the figure was quite close, within the range of the yellow light from the porch, that they saw clearly what had come.

The man was a stranger, and it is rare that a stranger enters the town on foot at that hour. Besides, the man was a hunchback. He was scarcely more than four feet tall and he wore a ragged, dusty coat that reached only to his knees. His crooked little legs seemed too thin to carry the weight of his great warped chest and the hump that sat on his shoulders.

He had a very large head, with deep-set blue eyes and a sharp little mouth. His face was both soft and sassy—at the moment his pale skin was yellowed by dust and there were lavender shadows beneath his eyes. He carried a lopsided old suitcase which was tied with a rope.

" Evening," said the hunchback, and he was out of breath.

Miss Amelia and the men on the porch neither answered his greeting nor spoke. They only looked at him.

" I am hunting for Miss Amelia Evans."

Miss Amelia pushed back her hair from her forehead and raised her chin. " How come ? "

" Because I am kin to her," the hunchback said.

The twins and Stumpy MacPhail looked up at Miss Amelia.

" That's me," she said. " How do you mean ' kin ' ? "

" Because—" the hunchback began.

He looked uneasy, almost as though he was about to cry. He rested the suitcase on the bottom step, but did not take his hand from the handle.

" My mother was Fanny Jesup and she come from Cheehaw. She left Cheehaw some thirty years ago when she married her first husband. I remember hearing her tell how she had a half-sister named Martha. And back in Cheehaw today they tell me that was your mother."

Miss Amelia listened with her head turned slightly aside. She ate her Sunday dinners by herself; her place was never crowded with a flock of relatives, and she claimed kin with no one. She had had a great-aunt who owned the livery stable in Cheehaw, but that aunt was now dead.

Apart from her there was only one double first cousin who lived in a town miles away, but this cousin and Miss Amelia did not get on so well, and when they chanced to pass each other they spat on the side of the road. Other people had tried very hard, from time to time, to work out some kind of far-fetched connection with Miss Amelia, but with absolutely no success.

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The hunchback went into a long rigmarole, mentioning names and places that were unknown to the listeners on the porch and seemed to have nothing to do with the subject.

"So Fanny and Martha Jesup were half-sisters. And I am the son of Fanny's third husband so that would make you and I—"

He bent down and began to unfasten his suitcase. His hands were like dirty sparrow claws and they were trembling. The bag was full of all manner of junk—ragged clothes and odd rubbish that looked like parts out of a sewing machine, or something just as worthless. The hunchback scrambled among these belongings and brought out an old photograph. "This is a picture of my mother and her half-sister."

Miss Amelia did not speak. She was moving her jaw slowly from side to side, and you could tell from her face what she was thinking about.

Stumpy MacPhail took the photograph and held it out toward the light. It was a picture of two pale, withered-up little children of about two and three years of age. The faces were tiny white blurs, and it might have been an old picture in anyone's album.

Stumpy MacPhail handed it back with no comment. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

The hunchback's voice was uncertain. "I was travelling."

Still Miss Amelia did not speak. She just stood leaning against the side of the door, and looked down at the hunchback.

Henry Macy winked nervously and rubbed his hands together. Then quietly he left the bottom step and disappeared. He is a good soul, and the hunchback's situation had touched his heart. Therefore he did not want to wait and watch Miss Amelia chase this newcomer off her property and run him out of town.

The hunchback stood with his bag open on the bottom step; he sniffled his nose, and his mouth quivered. Perhaps he began to to feel his dismal predicament. Maybe he realized what a miserable thing it was to be a stranger in the town with a suitcase full of junk, and claiming kin with Miss Amelia. At any rate he sat down on the steps and suddenly began to cry.

It was not a common thing to have an unknown hunchback walk to the store at midnight and then sit down and cry. Miss Amelia rubbed back her hair from her forehead and the men looked at each other uncomfortably. All around the town was very quiet.

At last one of the twins said: "I'll be damned if he ain't a regular Morris Finestein."

Everyone nodded and agreed, for that is an expression having a certain special meaning. But the hunchback cried louder because he could not know what they were talking about.

Morris Finestein was a person who had lived in the town years before. He was only a quick, skipping little Jew who cried if you called him Christ-killer, and ate light bread and canned salmon every day. A calamity had come over him and he had moved away to

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Society City. But since then if a man were prissy in any way, or if a man ever wept, he was known as a Morris Finestein.

"Well, he is afflicted," said Stumpy MacPhail. "There is some cause."

Miss Amelia crossed the porch with two slow, gangling strides. She went down the steps and stood looking thoughtfully at the stranger. Gingerly, with one long brown forefinger, she touched the hump on his back.

The hunchback still wept, but he was quieter now. The night was silent and the moon still shone with a soft, clear light—it was getting colder.

Then Miss Amelia did a rare thing; she pulled out a bottle from her hip pocket and after polishing off the top with the palm of her hand she handed it to the hunchback to drink. Miss Amelia could seldom be persuaded to sell her liquor on credit, and for her to give so much as a drop away free was almost unknown.

"Drink," she said. "It will liven your gizzard."

The hunchback stopped crying, neatly licked the tears from around his mouth, and did as he was told. When he had finished, Miss Amelia took a slow swallow, warmed and washed her mouth with it, and spat. Then she also drank. The twins and the foreman had their own bottle they had paid for.

"It is smooth liquor," Stumpy MacPhail said. "Miss Amelia, I have never known you to fail."

The whisky they drank that evening (two big bottles of it) is important. Otherwise, it would be hard to account for what followed. Perhaps without it there would never have been a café.

For the liquor of Miss Amelia has a special quality of its own. It is clean and sharp on the tongue, but once down a man it glows inside him for a long time afterward. And that is not all. It is known that if a message is written with lemon juice on a clean sheet of paper there will be no sign of it. But if the paper is held for a moment to the fire then the letters turn brown and the meaning becomes clear.

Imagine that the whisky is the fire and that the message is that which is known only in the soul of a man—then the worth of Miss Amelia's liquor can be understood. Things that have gone unnoticed, thoughts that have been harboured far back in the dark mind, are suddenly recognized and comprehended. A spinner who has thought only of the loom, his dinner, bed, and then the loom again—this spinner might drink some on a Sunday and come across a marsh lily. And in his palm he might hold this flower, examining the golden dainty cup, and in him suddenly might come a sweetness keen as pain.

A weaver might look up suddenly and see for the first time the cold, weird radiance of a midnight January sky, and a deep fright at his own smallness stop his heart. Such things as these, then, happen when a man has drunk Miss Amelia's liquor. He may suffer, or he may be spent with joy—but the experience has shown the truth; he has warmed his soul and seen the message hidden there.

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They drank until it was past midnight, and the moon was clouded over so that the night was cold and dark. The hunchback still sat on the bottom steps, bent over miserably with his forehead resting on his knee. Miss Amelia stood with her hands in her pockets, one foot resting on the second step of the stairs. She had been silent for a long time. Her face had the expression often seen in slightly cross-eyed persons who are thinking deeply, a look that appears to be both very wise and very crazy. At last she said: "I don't know your name."

"I'm Lymon Willis," said the hunchback.

"Well, come on in," she said. "Some supper was left in the stove and you can eat."

Only a few times in her life had Miss Amelia invited anyone to eat with her, unless she were planning to trick them in some way, or make money out of them. So the men on the porch felt there was something wrong. Later, they said among themselves that she must have been drinking back in the swamp the better part of the afternoon. At any rate she left the porch, and Stumpy MacPhail and the twins went on off home.

She bolted the front door and looked all around to see that her goods were in order. Then she went to the kitchen, which was at the back of the store. The hunchback followed her, dragging his suitcase, sniffing and wiping his nose on the sleeve of his dirty coat.

"Sit down," said Miss Amelia. "I'll just warm up what's here."

It was a good meal they had together on that night. Miss Amelia was rich and she did not grudge herself food. There was fried chicken (the breast of which the hunchback took on his own plate), mashed rootabeggars, collard greens, and hot, pale golden, sweet potatoes. Miss Amelia ate slowly and with the relish of a farm hand. She sat with both elbows on the table, bent over the plate, her knees spread wide apart and her feet braced on the rungs of the chair. As for the hunchback, he gulped down his supper as though he had not smelled food in months. During the meal one tear crept down his dingy cheek—but it was just a little leftover tear and meant nothing at all.

The lamp on the table was well-trimmed, burning blue at the edges of the wick, and casting a cheerful light in the kitchen. When Miss Amelia had eaten her supper she wiped her plate carefully with a slice of light bread, and then poured her own clear, sweet syrup over the bread. The hunchback did likewise—except that he was more finicky and asked for a new plate.

Having finished, Miss Amelia tilted back her chair, tightened her fist, and felt the hard, supple muscles of her right arm beneath the clean, blue cloth of her shirt-sleeves—an unconscious habit with her, at the close of a meal. Then she took the lamp from the table and jerked her head toward the staircase as an invitation for the hunchback to follow after her.

Above the store there were the three rooms where Miss Amelia had lived during all her life—two bedrooms with a large parlour in between. Few people had even seen these rooms, but it was gen-

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erally known that they were well-furnished and extremely clean. And now Miss Amelia was taking up with her a dirty little hunchbacked stranger, come from God knows where.

Miss Amelia walked slowly, two steps at a time, holding the lamp high. The hunchback hovered so close behind her that the swinging light made on the staircase wall one great, twisted shadow of the two of them. Soon the premises above the store were dark as the rest of the town.

The next morning was serene, with a sunrise of warm purple mixed with rose. In the fields around the town the furrows were newly ploughed, and very early the tenants were at work setting out the young, deep green tobacco plants. The wild crows flew down close to the fields, making swift blue shadows on the earth. In town the people set out early, carrying their dinners, and the windows of the mill were blinding gold in the sun. The air was fresh and the peach trees light as March clouds with their blossoms.

Miss Amelia came down at about dawn, as usual. She washed her head at the pump and very shortly set about her business. Later in the morning she saddled her mule and went to see about her property, planted with cotton, up near the Forks Falls Road. By noon, of course, everybody had heard about the hunchback who had come to the store in the middle of the night. But no one as yet had seen him.

The day soon grew hot and the sky was a rich, midday blue. Still no one had laid an eye on this strange guest. A few people remembered that Miss Amelia's mother had had a half-sister—but there was some difference of opinion as to whether she had died or had run off with a tobacco stringer. As for the hunchback's claim, everyone thought it was a trumped-up business. And the town, knowing Miss Amelia, decided that surely she had put him out of the house after feeding him.

But toward evening, when the sky had whitened, and the shift was done, a woman claimed to have seen a crooked face at the window of one of the rooms up over the store. Miss Amelia herself said nothing. She clerked in the store for a while, argued for an hour with a farmer over a plough shaft, mended some chicken wire, locked up near sundown, and went to her rooms. The town was left puzzled and talkative.

The next day Miss Amelia did not open the store, but stayed locked up inside her premises and saw no one. Now this was the day that the rumour started—the rumour so terrible that the town and all the country about were stunned by it.

The rumour was started by a weaver called Merlie Ryan. He is a man of not much account—sallow, shambling, and with no teeth in his head. He has the three-day malaria, which means that every third day the fever comes on him. So on two days he is dull and cross, but on the third day he livens up and sometimes has an idea or two, most of which are foolish. It was while Merlie Ryan was in his fever that he turned suddenly and said :

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"I know what Miss Amelia done. She murdered that man for something in that suitcase."

He said this in a calm voice, as a statement of fact. And within an hour the news had swept through the town. It was a fierce and sickly tale the town built up that day. In it were all the things which cause the heart to shiver—a hunchback, a midnight burial in the swamp, the dragging of Miss Amelia through the streets of the town on the way to prison, the squabbles over what would happen to her property—all told in hushed voices and repeated with some fresh and weird detail. It rained and women forgot to bring in the washing from the lines. One or two mortals, who were in debt to Miss Amelia, even put on Sunday clothes as though it were a holiday. People clustered together on the main street, talking and watching the store.

It would be untrue to say that all the town took part in this evil festival. There were a few sensible men who reasoned that Miss Amelia, being rich, would not go out of her way to murder a vagabond for a few trifles of junk. In the town there were even three good people, and they did not want this crime, not even for the sake of the interest and the great commotion it would entail; it gave them no pleasure to think of Miss Amelia holding to the bars of the penitentiary and being electrocuted in Atlanta.

These good people judged Miss Amelia in a different way from what the others judged her. When a person is as contrary in every single respect as she was and when the sins of a person have amounted to such a point that they can hardly be remembered all at once—then this person plainly requires a special judgment. They remembered that Miss Amelia had been born dark and somewhat queer of face, raised motherless by her father who was a solitary man, that early in youth she had grown to be six feet two inches tall which in itself is not natural for a woman, and that her ways and habits of life were too peculiar ever to reason about.

Above all, they remembered her puzzling marriage, which was the most unreasonable scandal ever to happen in this town.

So these good people felt toward her something near to pity. And when she was out on her own wild business, such as rushing into a house to drag forth a sewing-machine in payment for a debt, or getting herself worked up over some matter concerning the law—they had toward her a feeling which was a mixture of exasperation, a ridiculous little inside tickle, and a deep, unnameable sadness. But enough of the good people, for there were only three of them; the rest of the town was making a holiday of this fancied crime the whole of the afternoon.

Miss Amelia herself, for some strange reason, seemed unaware of all this. She spent most of her day upstairs. When down in the store, she prowled around peacefully, her hands deep in the pockets of her overalls and head bent so low that her chin was tucked inside the collar of her shirt. There was no bloodstain on her anywhere. Often she stopped and just stood sombrely looking down at the

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cracks in the floor, twisting a lock of her short-cropped hair, and whispering something to herself. But most of the day was spent upstairs.

Dark came on. The rain that afternoon had chilled the air, so that the evening was bleak and gloomy as in winter-time. There were no stars in the sky, and a light, icy drizzle had set in. The lamps in the houses made mournful, wavering flickers when watched from the street. A wind had come up, not from the swamp side of the town but from the cold black pinewoods to the north.

The clocks in the town struck eight. Still nothing had happened. The bleak night, after the gruesome talk of the day, put a fear in some people, and they stayed home close to the fire. Others were gathered in groups together. Some eight or ten men had convened on the porch of Miss Amelia's store. They were silent and were indeed just waiting about.

They themselves did not know what they were waiting for, but it was this: in times of tension, when some great action is impending, men gather and wait in this way. And after a time there will come a moment when all together they will act in unison, not from thought or from the will of any one man, but as though their instincts had merged together so that the decision belongs to no single one of them, but to the group as a whole. At such a time no individual hesitates. And whether the matter will be settled peaceably, or whether the joint action will result in ransacking, violence, and crime, depends on destiny.

So the men waited soberly on the porch of Miss Amelia's store, not one of them realizing what they would do, but knowing inwardly that they must wait, and that the time had almost come.

Now the door to the store was open. Inside it was bright and natural-looking. To the left was the counter where slabs of white meat, rock candy, and tobacco were kept. Behind this were shelves of salted white meat and meal. The right side of the store was mostly filled with farm implements and such. At the back of the store, to the left, was the door leading up the stairs, and it was open. And at the far right of the store there was another door which led to a little room that Miss Amelia called her office. This door was also open. And at eight o'clock that evening Miss Amelia could be seen there sitting before her roll-top desk, figuring with a fountain pen and some pieces of paper.

The office was cheerfully lighted, and Miss Amelia did not seem to notice the delegation on the porch. Everything around her was in great order, as usual.

This office was a room well-known, in a dreadful way, throughout the country. It was there Miss Amelia transacted all business. On the desk was a carefully covered typewriter which she knew how to run, but used only for the most important documents. In the drawers were literally thousands of papers, all filed according to the alphabet.

This office was also the place where Miss Amelia received sick people, for she enjoyed doctoring and did a great deal of it. Two whole shelves were crowded with bottles and various paraphernalia.

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Against the wall was a bench where the patients sat. She could sew up a wound with a burnt needle so that it would not turn green. For burns she had a cool, sweet syrup. For unlocated sickness there were any number of different medicines which she had brewed herself from unknown recipes. They wrenched loose the bowels very well, but they could not be given to small children, as they caused bad convulsions; for them she had an entirely separate draught, gentler and sweet-flavoured.

Yes, all in all, she was considered a good doctor. Her hands, though very large and bony, had a light touch about them. She possessed great imagination and used hundreds of different cures. In the face of the most dangerous and extraordinary treatment she did not hesitate, and no disease was so terrible but what she would undertake to cure it.

In this there was one exception. If a patient came with a female complaint she could do nothing. Indeed at the mere mention of the words her face would slowly darken with shame, and she would stand there craning her neck against the collar of her shirt, or rubbing her swamp boots together, for all the world like a great, shamed, dumb-tongued child. But in other matters people trusted her. She charged no fees whatsoever and always had a queue of patients.

On this evening Miss Amelia wrote with her fountain pen a good deal. But even so she could not be forever unaware of the group waiting out there on the dark porch, and watching her.

From time to time she looked up and regarded them steadily. But she did not holler out to them to demand why they were loafing around her property like a sorry bunch of gabbies. Her face was proud and stern, as it always was when she sat at the desk of her office. After a time their peering in like that seemed to annoy her. She wiped her cheek with a red handkerchief, got up, and closed the office door.

Now to the group on the porch this gesture acted as a signal. The time had come. They had stood for a long while with the night raw and gloomy in the street behind them. They had waited long and just at that moment the instinct to act came on them.

All at once, as though moved by one will, they walked into the store. At that moment the eight men looked very much alike—all wearing blue overalls, most of them with whitish hair, all pale of face, and all with a set, dreaming look in the eyes. What they would have done next no one knows. But at that instant there was a noise at the head of the staircase.

The men looked up and then stood dumb with shock. It was the hunchback, whom they had already murdered in their minds. Also, the creature was not at all as had been pictured to them—not a pitiful and dirty little chatterer, alone and beggared in this world. Indeed, he was like nothing any man among them had ever beheld until that time. The room was still as death.

The hunchback came down slowly with the proudness of one

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who owns every plank of the floor beneath his feet. In the past days he had greatly changed. For one thing he was clean beyond words. He still wore his little coat but it was brushed off and neatly mended. Beneath this was a fresh red and black checkered shirt belonging to Miss Amelia. He did not wear trousers such as ordinary men are meant to wear, but a pair of tight-fitting little knee-length breeches. On his skinny legs he wore black stockings, and his shoes were of a special kind, being queerly shaped, laced up over the ankles, and newly cleaned and polished with wax.

Around his neck, so that his large, pale ears were almost completely covered, he wore a shawl of lime-green wool, the fringes of which almost touched the floor.

The hunchback walked down the store with his stiff little strut, and then stood in the centre of the group that had come inside. They cleared a space about him and stood looking, with hands loose at their sides and eyes wide open. The hunchback himself got his bearings in an odd manner. He regarded each person steadily at his own eye-level, which was about belt line for an ordinary man. Then with shrewd deliberation he examined each man's lower regions—from the waist to the sole of the shoe.

When he had satisfied himself he closed his eyes for a moment and shook his head as though, in his opinion, what he had seen did not amount to much. Then with assurance, only to confirm himself, he tilted back his head and took in the halo of faces around him with one long, circling stare. There was a half-filled sack of guano on the left side of the store, and when he had found his bearings in this way, the hunchback sat down upon it. Cosily settled, with his little legs crossed, he took from his coat pocket a certain object.

Now it took some moments for the men in the store to regain their ease. Merlie Ryan, he of the three-day fever who had started the rumour that day, was the first to speak. He looked at the object which the hunchback was fondling, and said in a hushed voice:

"What is it you have there?"

Each man knew well what it was the hunchback was handling. For it was the snuff-box which had belonged to Miss Amelia's father. The snuff-box was of blue enamel with a dainty embellishment of wrought gold on the lid. The group knew it well and marvelled. They glanced warily at the closed office door, and heard the low sound of Miss Amelia whistling to herself.

"Yes, what is it, Peanut?"

The hunchback looked up quickly and sharpened his mouth to speak. "Why, this is a lay-low to catch-meddlers."

The hunchback reached in the box with his scrambly little fingers and ate something, but he offered no one around him a taste. It was not even proper snuff which he was taking, but a mixture of sugar and cocoa. This he took, though, as snuff, pocketing a little wad of it beneath his lower lip and licking down neatly into this with a flick of his tongue which made a frequent grimace come over his face.

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"The very teeth in my head have always tasted sour to me," he said in explanation. "That is the reason why I take this kind of sweet snuff."

The group still clustered around, feeling somewhat gawky and bewildered. This sensation never quite wore off, but it was soon tempered by another feeling—an air of intimacy in the room and a vague festivity. Now the names of the men of the group there on that evening were as follows: Hasty Malone, Robert Calvert Hale, Merlie Ryan, Reverend T. M. Willin, Rosser Cline, Rip Wellborn, Henry Ford Crimp and Horace Wells. Except for the Reverend Willin, they are all alike in many ways as has been said—all having taken pleasure from something or other, all having wept and suffered in some way, most of them tractable unless exasperated. Each of them worked in the mill, and lived with others in a two- or three-room house for which the rent was ten dollars or twelve dollars a month. All had been paid that afternoon, for it was Saturday. So, for the present, think of them as a whole.

The hunchback, however, was already sorting them out in his mind. Once comfortably settled he began to chat with everyone asking such questions as whether a man was married, how old he was, how much his wages came to in an average week, et cetera—picking his way along to inquiries which were downright intimate.

Soon the group was joined by others in the town, Henry Macy, idlers who had sensed something extraordinary, women come to fetch their men who lingered on, and even one loose, tow-headed child who tiptoed into the store, stole a box of animal crackers, and made off very quietly. So the premises of Miss Amelia were soon crowded, and she herself had not yet opened her office door.

There is a type of person who has a quality about him that sets him apart from other and more ordinary human beings. Such a person has an instinct which is usually found only in small children, an instinct to establish immediate and vital contact between himself and all things in the world. Certainly the hunchback was of this type.

He had only been in the store half an hour before an immediate contact had been established between him and each other individual. It was as though he had lived in the town for years, was a well-known character, and had been sitting and talking there on that guano sack for countless evenings. This, together with the fact that it was Saturday night, could account for the air of freedom and illicit gladness in the store. There was a tension, also, partly because of the oddity of the situation and partly because Miss Amelia was still closed off in her office and had not yet made her appearance.

She came out that evening at ten o'clock. And those who were expecting some drama at her entrance were disappointed. She opened the door and walked in with her slow, gangling swagger. There was a streak of ink on one side of her nose, and she had knotted the red handkerchief about her neck. She seemed to notice nothing unusual. Her grey, crossed eyes glanced over to the place where the hunchback was sitting, and for a moment lingered there.

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The rest of the crowd in her store she regarded with only a peaceable surprise.

"Does anyone want waiting on?" she asked quietly.

There were a number of customers, because it was Saturday night, and they all wanted liquor. Now Miss Amelia had dug up an aged barrel only three days before and had siphoned it into bottles back by the still. This night she took the money from the customers and counted it beneath the bright light. Such was the ordinary procedure. But after this what happened was not ordinary.

Always before it was necessary to go around to the dark back yard, and there she would hand out your bottle through the kitchen door. There was no feeling of joy in the transaction. After getting his liquor the customer walked off into the night. Or, if his wife would not have it in the home, he was allowed to come around to the front porch of the store and guzzle there or in the street. Now both the porch and the street before it were the property of Miss Amelia, and no mistake about it—but she did not regard them as her premises; the premises began at the front door and took in the entire inside of the building. There she had never allowed liquor to be opened or drunk by anyone but herself.

Now for the first time she broke this rule. She went to the kitchen, with the hunchback close at her heels, and she brought back the bottles into the warm bright store. More than that, she furnished some glasses and opened two boxes of crackers so that they were there hospitably in a platter on the counter and anyone who wished could take one free.

She spoke to no one but the hunchback, and she only asked him in a somewhat harsh and husky voice: "Cousin Lymon, will you have yours straight, or warmed in a pan with water on the stove?"

"If you please, Amelia," the hunchback said. (And since what time had anyone presumed to address Miss Amelia by her bare name, without a title of respect?—Certainly not her bridegroom and her husband of ten days. In fact, not since the death of her father, who for some reason had always called her Little, had anyone dared to address her in such a familiar way.) "If you please, I'll have it warmed."

Now, this was the beginning of the café. It was as simple as that. Recall that the night was gloomy as in winter-time, and to have sat around the property outside would have made a sorry celebration. But inside there was company and a genial warmth. Someone had rattled up the stove in the rear, and those who bought bottles shared their liquor with friends. Several women were there and they had twists of liquorice, a Nehi, or even a swallow of the whisky.

The hunchback was still a novelty and his presence amused everyone. The bench in the office was brought in, together with several extra chairs. Other people leaned against the counter or made themselves comfortable on barrels and sacks. Nor did the opening of liquor on the premises cause any rumbustiousness,

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indecent giggles, or misbehaviour whatsoever. On the contrary, the company was polite even to the point of a certain timidness. For people in this town were then unused to gathering together for the sake of pleasure. They met to work in the mill. Or on Sunday there would be an all-day camp meeting—and though that is a pleasure, the intention of the whole affair is to sharpen your view of Hell and put into you a keen fear of the Lord Almighty.

But the spirit of a café is altogether different. Even the richest, greediest old rascal will behave himself, insulting no one in a proper café. And poor people look about them gratefully and pinch up the salt in a dainty and modest manner. For the atmosphere of a proper café implies these qualities : fellowship, the satisfactions of the belly, and a certain gaiety and grace of behaviour. This had never been told to the gathering in Miss Amelia's store that night. But they knew it of themselves, although never, of course, until that time had there been a café in the town.

Now, the cause of all this, Miss Amelia, stood most of the evening in the doorway leading to the kitchen. Outwardly, she did not seem changed at all. But there were many who noticed her face. She watched all that went on, but most of the time her eyes were fastened lonesomely on the hunchback. He strutted about the store, eating from his snuff-box, and being at once sour and agreeable. Where Miss Amelia stood, the light from the chinks of the stove cast a glow, so that her brown, long face was somewhat brightened. She seemed to be looking inward. There was in her expression pain, perplexity, and uncertain joy. Her lips were not so firmly set as usual, and she swallowed often. Her skin had paled and her large empty hands were sweating. Her look that night, then, was the lonesome look of the lover.

This opening of the café came to an end at midnight. Everyone said good-bye to everyone else in a friendly fashion. Miss Amelia shut the front door of her premises, but forgot to bolt it. Soon everything—the main street with its three stores, the mill, the houses—all the town, in fact—was dark and silent. And so ended three days and nights in which had come an arrival of a stranger, an unholy holiday, and the start of the café.

Now time must pass. For the next four years are much alike. There are great changes, but these changes are brought about bit by bit in simple steps which in themselves do not appear to be important.

The hunchback continued to live with Miss Amelia. The café expanded in a gradual way. Miss Amelia began to sell her liquor by the drink, and some tables were brought into the store. There were customers every evening, and on Saturday a great crowd. Miss Amelia began to serve fried catfish suppers at fifteen cents a plate. The hunchback cajoled her into buying a fine mechanical piano. Within two years the place was a store no longer, but had been converted into a proper café, open every evening from six until twelve o'clock.

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Each night the hunchback came down the stairs with the air of one who has a grand opinion of himself. He always smelled slightly of turnip greens, as Miss Amelia rubbed him night and morning with pot liquor to give him strength. She spoiled him to a point beyond reason, but nothing seemed to strengthen him; food only made his hump and his head grow larger while the rest of him remained weakly and deformed.

Miss Amelia was the same in appearance. During the week she still wore swamp boots and overalls, but on Sunday she put on a dark red dress that hung on her in a most peculiar fashion. Her manners, however, and her way of life were greatly changed. She still loved a fierce lawsuit, but she was not so quick to cheat her fellow man and to exact cruel payments. Because the hunchback was so extremely sociable she even went about a little—to revivals, to funerals, and so forth. Her doctoring was as successful as ever, her liquor even finer than before, if that were possible. The café itself proved profitable and was the only place of pleasure for many miles around.

So for the moment regard these years from random and disjointed viewpoints. See the hunchback marching in Miss Amelia's footsteps when on a red winter morning they set out for the pine-woods to hunt. See them working on her properties—with Cousin Lymon standing by and doing absolutely nothing, but quick to point out any laziness among the hands. On autumn afternoons they sat on the back steps chopping sugar cane.

The glaring summer days they spent down by the swamp where the water cypress is a deep black green, where beneath the tangled swamp trees there is a drowsy gloom. When the path leads through a bog or a stretch of blackened water see Miss Amelia bend down to let Cousin Lymon scramble on her back—and see her wading forward with the hunchback settled on her shoulders, clinging to her ears or to her broad forehead. Occasionally Miss Amelia cranked up the car which she had bought and treated Cousin Lymon to a picture-show in Cheehaw, or to some distant fair or cockfight; the hunchback took a passionate delight in spectacles.

Of course, they were in their café every morning, they would often sit for hours together by the fire-place in the parlour upstairs. For the hunchback was sickly at night and dreaded to lie looking into the dark. He had a deep fear of death. And Miss Amelia would not leave him by himself to suffer with this fright. It may even be reasoned that the growth of the café came about mainly on this account; it was a thing that brought him company and pleasure and that helped him through the night. So compose from such flashes an image of these years as a whole. And for a moment let it rest.

Now some explanation is due for all this behaviour. The time has come to speak about love. For Miss Amelia loved Cousin Lymon.

So much was clear to everyone. They lived in the same house together and were never seen apart. Therefore, according to Mrs.

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MacPhail, a warty-nosed old busy-body who is continually moving her sticks of furniture from one part of the front room to another; according to her and to certain others, these two were living in sin. If they were related, they were only a cross between first and second cousins, and even that could in no way be proved. Now, of course—, Miss Amelia was a powerful blunderbuss of a person, more than six feet tall—and Cousin Lymon a weakly little hunchback reaching only to her waist. But so much the better for Mrs. Stumpy MacPhail and her cronies, for they and their kind glory in conjunctions which are ill-matched and pitiful. So let them be.

The good people thought that if those two had found some satisfaction of the flesh between themselves, then it was a matter concerning them and God alone. All sensible people agreed in their opinion about this conjecture and their answer was a plain, flat *no*. What sort of thing, then, was this love?

First of all, love is a joint experience between two persons—but the fact that it is a joint experience does not mean that it is a similar experience to the two people involved. There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new, strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer.

So there is only one thing for the lover to do. He must house his love within himself as best he can; he must create for himself a whole new inward world—a world intense and strange, complete in himself. Let it be added here that this lover about whom we speak need not necessarily be a young man saving for a wedding ring—this lover can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth.

Now, the beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love. A man may be a doddering great-grandfather and still love only a strange girl he saw in the streets of Cheehaw one afternoon two decades past. The preacher may love a fallen woman. The beloved may be treacherous, greasy-headed, and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else—but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit.

A most mediocre person can be the object of a love which is wild, extravagant, and beautiful as the poison lilies of the swamp. A good man may be the stimulus for a love both violent and debased, or a jabbering madman may bring about in the soul of someone a tender and simple idyll. Therefore, the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.

It is for this reason that most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved.

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The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain.

It has been mentioned before that Miss Amelia was once married. And this curious episode might as well be accounted for at this point. Remember that it all happened long ago, and that it was Miss Amelia's only personal contact, before the hunchback came to her, with this phenomenon—love.

The town then was the same as it is now, except there were two stores instead of three, and the peach trees along the street were smaller than they are now. Miss Amelia was nineteen years old at the time, and her father had been dead many months.

There was in the town at that time a loom-fixer named Marvin Macy. He was the brother of Henry Macy, although to know them you would never guess that those two could be kin. For Marvin Macy was the handsomest man in this region—being six feet one inch tall, hard-muscled, and with slow grey eyes and curly hair. He was well off, made good wages, and had a gold watch which opened in the back to a picture of a waterfall. From the outward and worldly point of view Marvin Macy was a fortunate fellow; he needed to bow and scrape to no one, and always got just what he wanted. But from a more serious and thoughtful viewpoint Marvin Macy was not a person to be envied, for he was an evil character. His reputation was as bad, if not worse, than that of any young man in the county.

For years, when he was a boy, he had carried about with him the dried and salted ear of a man he had killed in a razor fight. He had chopped off the tails of squirrels in the pinewoods just to please his fancy, and in his left hip pocket he carried forbidden marijuana weed to tempt those who were discouraged and drawn toward death. Yet in spite of his reputation he was the beloved of many females in this region—and there were at the time several young girls who were clean-haired and soft-eyed, with tender sweet little buttocks and charming ways. These gentle young girls he degraded and shamed.

Then finally, at the age of twenty-two, this Marvin Macy chose Miss Amelia. That solitary, gangling, queer-eyed girl was the one he longed for. Nor did he want her because of her money, but solely out of love.

And love changed Marvin Macy. Before the time when he loved Miss Amelia it could be questioned if such a person had within him a heart and soul. Yet there is some explanation for the ugliness of his character, for Marvin Macy had had a hard beginning in this world. He was one of six unwanted children whose parents could hardly be called parents at all; these parents were wild young 'uns, who liked to fish and roam around the swamp. Their own children, and there was a new one almost every year, were only a nuisance to them.

At night when they came home from the mill they would look at the children as though they did not know wherever they had come from. If the children cried they were beaten, and the first thing they learned in this world was to seek the darkest corner of the room and

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try to hide themselves as best they could. They were as thin as little white-haired ghosts, and they did not speak, not even to each other. Finally, they were abandoned by their parents altogether and left to the mercies of the town. The eldest child, who was eight years old, walked into Cheehaw and disappeared. Three other children were boarded out amongst the town, being sent around from one kitchen to another, and as they were delicate they died before Easter time.

The last two children were Marvin Macy and Henry Macy. There was a good woman in the town named Mrs. Mary Hale, and she took Marvin Macy and Henry Macy and loved them as her own. They were brought up in her household and treated well.

But the hearts of small children are delicate organs. A cruel beginning in this world can twist them into curious shapes. The heart of a hurt child can shrink so that forever afterwards it is hard and pitted as the stone of a peach. Or again, the heart of such a child may fester and swell until it is a misery to carry within the body, easily chafed and hurt by the most ordinary things. This last is what happened to Henry Macy, who is so opposite to his brother, and is the kindest and gentlest man in town. He lends his wages to those who are unfortunate, and he used to care for the children whose parents were at the café on Saturday night. But he is a shy man, and he has the look of one who has a swollen heart and suffers.

Marvin Macy, however, grew to be bold and fearless and cruel. His heart turned tough as the horns of Satan, and until the time when he loved Miss Amelia he brought to his brother and the good woman who raised him nothing but shame and trouble.

But love reversed the character of Marvin Macy. For two years he loved Miss Amelia, but he did not declare himself. He would stand near the door of her premises, his cap in his hand, his eyes meek and longing and misty grey.

He reformed himself completely. He was good to his brother and foster mother, and he saved his wages and learned thrift. Moreover, he reached out toward God. No longer did he lie around on the floor of the front porch all day Sunday, singing and playing his guitar; he attended church services and was present at all religious meetings. He learned good manners: he trained himself to rise and give his chair to a lady, and he quit swearing and fighting and using holy names in vain.

So for two years he passed through this transformation and improved his character in every way. Then at the end of the two years he went one evening to Miss Amelia, carrying a bunch of swamp flowers, a sack of chitterlings, and a silver ring—that night Marvin Macy declared himself.

And Miss Amelia married him. Later everyone wondered why. Some said it was because she wanted to get herself some wedding presents. Others believed it came about through the nagging of Miss Amelia's great-aunt in Cheehaw, who was a terrible old woman.

Anyway, she strode with great steps down the aisle of the church wearing her dead mother's bridal gown, which was of yellow satin and at least twelve inches too short for her. It was a winter afternoon

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and the clear sun shone through the ruby windows of the church and put a curious glow on the pair before the altar. As the marriage lines were read Miss Amelia kept making an odd gesture—she would rub the palm of her right hand down the side of her satin wedding-gown. She was reaching for the pocket of her overalls, and being unable to find it her face became impatient, bored and exasperated.

At last when the lines were spoken and the marriage prayer was done Miss Amelia hurried out of the church, not taking the arm of her husband, but walking at least two paces ahead of him.

The church is no distance from the store so the bride and groom walked home. It is said that on the way Miss Amelia began to talk about some deal she had worked up with a farmer over a load of kindling wood. In fact, she treated her groom in exactly the same manner as she would have used some customer who had come into the store to buy a pint from her.

But so far all had gone decently enough; the town was gratified, as people had seen what this love had done to Marvin Macy and hoped that it might also reform his bride. At least, they counted on the marriage to tone down Miss Amelia's temper, to put a bit of bride-fat on her, and to change her at last into a calculable woman.

They were wrong. The young boys who watched through the window on that night said that this is what actually happened.

The bride and groom ate a grand supper prepared by Jeff, the old Negro who cooked for Miss Amelia. The bride took second servings of everything, but the groom picked with his food. Then the bride went about her ordinary business—reading the newspaper, finishing an inventory of the stock in the store, and so forth. The groom hung about in the doorway with a loose, foolish, blissful face and was not noticed. At eleven o'clock the bride took a lamp and went upstairs. The groom followed close behind her. So far all had gone decently enough, but what followed after was unholy.

Within half an hour Miss Amelia had stomped down the stairs in breeches and a khaki jacket. Her face had darkened so that it looked quite black.

She slammed the kitchen door and gave it an ugly kick. Then she controlled herself. She poked up the fire, sat down, and put her feet up on the kitchen stove. She read the *Farmer's Almanac*, drank coffee, and had a smoke with her father's pipe. Her face was hard, stern, and had now whitened to its natural colour. Sometimes she paused to jot down some information from the *Almanac*.

Towards dawn she went into her office and uncovered her typewriter, which she had recently bought and was only just learning how to run. That was the way in which she spent the whole of her wedding-night. At daylight she went out to her yard as though nothing whatsoever had occurred and did some carpentering on a rabbit hutch which she had begun the week before and intended to sell somewhere.

A groom is in a sorry fix when he is unable to bring his well-beloved bride to bed with him, and when the whole town knows it. Marvin Macy came down that day still in his wedding finery,

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and with a sick face. God knows how he had spent the night. He moped about the yard, watching Miss Amelia, but keeping some distance away from her.

Then toward noon an idea came to him and he went off in the direction of Society City. He returned with presents—an opal ring, a pink enamel doreen of the sort which was then in fashion, a silver bracelet with two hearts on it, and a box of candy which had cost two dollars and a half. Miss Amelia looked over these fine gifts and opened the box of candy, for she was hungry. The rest of the presents she judged shrewdly for a moment to sum up their value—then she put them out on the counter for sale.

The night was spent in much the same manner as the preceding one—except that Miss Amelia brought her feather mattress to make a pallet by the kitchen stove, and she slept fairly well.

Things went on like this for three days. Miss Amelia went about her business as usual, and took great interest in some rumour that a bridge was to be built some ten miles down the road. Marvin Macy still followed her about around the premises, and it was plain from his face how he suffered.

Then on the fourth day he did an extremely simple-minded thing: he went to Cheehaw and came back with a lawyer. In Miss Amelia's office he signed over to her the whole of his worldly goods, which was ten acres of timberland which he had bought with the money he had saved. She studied the paper sternly to make sure there was no possibility of a trick and filed it soberly in her desk.

That afternoon Marvin Macy took a quart bottle of whisky and went with it alone out in the swamp while the sun was still shining. Toward evening he came in drunk, went up to Miss Amelia with wet wide eyes, and put his hand on her shoulder. He was trying to tell her something, but before he could open his mouth she had swung once with her fist and hit his face so hard that he was thrown back against the wall and one of his front teeth was broken.

The rest of this affair can only be mentioned in bare outline. After this first blow Miss Amelia hit him whenever he came within arm's reach of her, and whenever he was drunk. At last she turned him off the premises altogether, and he was forced to suffer publicly. During the day he hung around just outside the boundary line of Miss Amelia's property and sometimes with a drawn, crazy look he would fetch his rifle and sit there cleaning it, peering at Miss Amelia steadily. If she was afraid she did not show it, but her face was sterner than ever, and often she spat on the ground.

His last foolish effort was to climb in the window of her store one night and to sit there in the dark, for no purpose whatsoever, until she came down the stairs next morning. For this Miss Amelia set off immediately to the courthouse in Cheehaw with some notion that she could get him locked in the penitentiary for trespassing.

Marvin Macy left the town that day, and no one saw him go, or knew just where he went. On leaving he put a long curious letter, partly written in pencil and partly in ink, beneath Miss Amelia's

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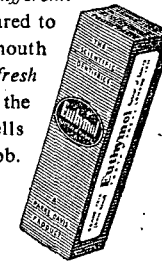

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door. It was a wild love letter—but in it were also included threats, and he swore that in his life he would get even with her.

His marriage had lasted for ten days. And the town felt the special satisfaction that people feel when someone has been thoroughly done in by some scandalous and terrible means.

Miss Amelia was left with everything that Marvin Macy had ever owned—his timberwood, his gold watch, every one of his possessions. But she seemed to attach little value to them and she cut up his Klansman's robe to cover her tobacco plants. So all that he had ever done was to make her richer and to bring her love. But, strange to say, she never spoke of him but with a terrible and spiteful bitterness. She never once referred to him by name but always mentioned him scornfully as "that loom-fixer I was married to."

And later, when horrifying rumours concerning Marvin Macy reached the town, Miss Amelia was very pleased. For the true character of Marvin Macy finally revealed itself, once he had freed himself of his love. He became a criminal whose picture and whose name were in all the papers in the state.

He robbed three filling stations and held up the A & P store of Society City with a sawed-off gun. He was suspected of the murder of Slit-Eye Sam who was a notorious gangster. All these crimes were connected with the name of Marvin Macy, so that his evil became famous through many countries. Then finally the law captured him, drunk, on the floor of a tourist cabin, his guitar by his side, and fifty-seven dollars in his right shoe. He was tried, sentenced, and sent off to the penitentiary near Atlanta. Miss Amelia was deeply gratified.

Well, all this happened a long time ago, and it is the story of Miss Amelia's marriage. The town laughed a long time over this grotesque affair. But though the outward facts of this love are indeed sad and ridiculous, it must be remembered that the real story was that which took place in the soul of the lover himself. So who but God can be the final judge of this or any other love?

On the very first night of the café there were several who suddenly thought of this broken bridegroom, locked in the gloomy penitentiary, many miles away. And in the years that followed, Marvin Macy was not altogether forgotten in the town. His name was never mentioned in the presence of Miss Amelia or the hunchback. But the memory of his passion and his crimes, and the thought of him trapped in his cell in the penitentiary, was like a troubling undertone beneath the happy love of Miss Amelia and the gaiety of the café. So do not forget this Marvin Macy, as he is to act a terrible part in the story which is yet to come.

★ ***The Second Part of Carson McCullers' dramatic story appears in next month's ARGOSY, on sale November 7th.***

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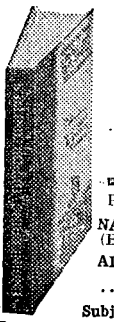

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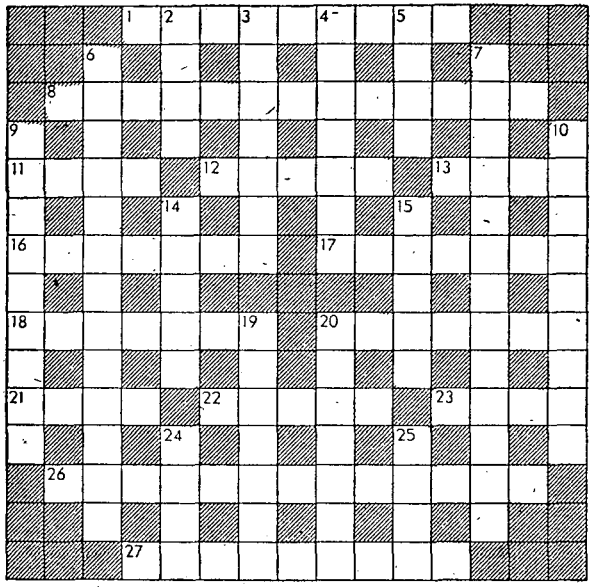
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 115



CLUES.

Across

1 A bird which evidently contributes to the high cost of shaving (5-4).

8 Debatable language ? (13).

11 It's hard on board ship, especially if you're on the wrong one ! (4).

12 "Sing, while the hours and the wild — follow" (Swinburne) (5).

13 This vessel sounds as if it's due to be broken up (4).

16 Bust him up and reveal the mineral basis (7).

17 "The — Chinee is peculiar, Which the same I am free to maintain" (Bret Harte) (7).

18 Generosity in present form (7).

20 This denial is more than half real (7).

21 Bonds worn decoratively round the neck (4).

22 A dashing young man or his sword (5).

23 This is almost a bonny town, though not in Scotland (4).

26 Limitless beginnings contribute to a very small whole (13).

27 This mouthpiece must take care not to put his head in the wheel ! (9).

Down

2 More than the ordinary sort of seaman, this (4).

3 The prophet who hid a hundred more (7).

4 The distance across a red bath (7).

5 Probably the only reluctant aspect of Lothario ! (4).

6 This N.C.O. is not necessarily in a cavalry regiment (5-8).

7 Is this girl drawn to an open-air life ? (13).

9 A short saint with talent — for keeping on an even keel presumably (9).

10 Peel a stone and find a miser (9).

14 Just the match to set off its own head (5).

15 David in Wales (5).

19 Alias Robinson Crusoe (7).

20 "I called the New World into existence to — the balance of the Old" (George Canning) (7).

24 Sound from twisted lips (4).

25 If you want to find the leading lady, turn avid (4).

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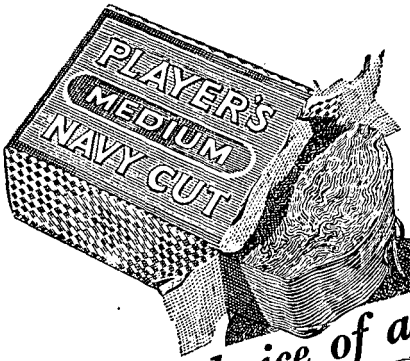

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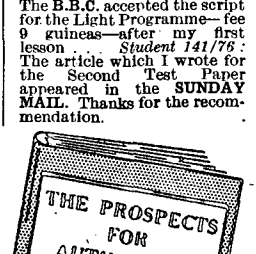

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